

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2005 \$4.95/CANADA \$5.95

www.cjr.org

## TIN SOLDIER

An American Vigilante In Afghanistan, Using the Press for Profit and Glory









#### International Center for Journalists

Sends journalists to teach colleagues worldwide. www.icfj.org

#### Inter American Press Association

Fights unpunished crimes against journalists. www.impunidad.com



Helps journalists in trouble.

#### International Women's Media Foundation

Trains women journalists.

#### CubaNet

Independent correspondents in Cuba. www.cubanet.org

#### Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas

Trains journalists in the Americas. knightcenter.utexas.edu

#### International Press Institute

Advances understanding of international news. www.freemedia.at

#### Internews Network

Fosters growth of independent media. www.internews.org

#### Salzburg Seminar

A global forum for journalists. www.salzburgseminar.org

#### Link TV

Unfiltered news
broadcasts from
the Middle East.
www.worldlinktv.org

#### World Press Freedom Committee

Responds to press freedom threats. www.wpfc.org

#### Independent Journalism Foundation

Trains journalists to work on independent media. www.ijf-cij.org

#### **World Press Institute**

Brings journalists to the U.S. www.macalester.edu/~wpi/

## A world of journalism is just a click away.

The World Wide Web has given us the power to be the most informed generation in human history – if we choose to use that power. On the web are links to extraordinary organizations active in all facets of international journalism. For the first time, a world of journalism is just a click away. Find the time. Make the leap. Get involved.



The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the vitality of 26 U.S. communities. Visit http://journalism.knightfdn.org.

#### OPENING SHOT



© BETTMANN/CORBIS

#### For What It's Worth

ook at Dan Rather, squaring off with security guards in 1968. He's trying to find out something that powerful people don't want him to know. For his efforts he was punched to the ground. More recently, Rather has been connected to some less noble journalistic endeavors. As Mariah Blake's cover story on page 22 shows, he and CBS, along with many others in the media, helped turn Keith Idema, a convicted fraud and failed soldier, into a faux hero. Then there is Rather's story on 60 Minutes II about Bush's glide through the Air National Guard — a story whose methods and questionable documents would subsequently be investigated by CBS itself. Still, whatever history's verdict, as Corey Pein demonstrates on page 30, the reporting about Rather's apparent missteps in this case has been as flawed as the alleged original sins. And regardless of how history treats Dan Rather, his roots are in a brand of tough-minded reporting that is too often lacking now. Anyone who wants to take part in journalism needs to remember that reporting is more than taking notes.

Dan Rather, attempting to learn why a delegate left the convention hall, scuffles with security at the 1968 Democratic National Convention

BRIAN **DENNEHY** 

DANNY GLOVER DELROY LINDO

AIDAN **QUINN**  SUSAN SARANDON

introducing DAVID BROWN, JR.



Guilty...until proven innocent.

## THE EXONERATED

Six riveting stories about innocence, injustice and redemption.

THURSDAY, JAN. 27 @ 9PM E/P

COURT The Investigation Channel

"To assess the performance of journalism . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

— from the founding editorial, 1961

#### **ARTICLES**

- **THE HOWLER'S QUIET MOMENT** Media scourge Bob Somerby glances back at 2004 **17** and ahead to his next crusade. By Steve Twomey
- TIN SOLDIER How a rogue "terror-fighter" used the press for profit and glory. By Mariah Blake 22

  BLOG-GATE Yes, CBS screwed up in "Memogate," but so did those who covered the affair. 30

  By Corey Pein
- **THE PARADOX OF PINK** The Serbian media are haunted by the past and uncertain about **36** the future all, that is, but trashy TV Pink. By Jared Manasek

#### COMMENTARY

- **EDITORIAL** Holding political power to account is not some liberal plot. **7**
- **VOICES** Mark I. Pinsky gets religion, and Judith Matloff makes the case **8** for embargoing kidnap stories.
- DARTS & LAURELS Exit-poll hypocrisy, cover ads, and more. By Gloria Cooper 12

#### **IDEAS & REVIEWS**

- **ESSAY: LET'S BLAME THE READERS** Is it possible to do great journalism if the public does not care? By Evan Cornog
- **CASTE AND CLASS AT THE WASHINGTON POST** Graham, Bradlee, and a butcher's son. **50**By Ivan G. Goldman
- SECOND READ Dale Maharidge revisits James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. 54
- **REVIEW** Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps 58
- by Donald A. Ritchie. Reviewed by Christopher Hanson
- BOOK REPORTS By James Boylan 62

  SCENE: CHEWING THE Q'AT What keeps Yemen's opposition journalists going 63

### By Geoffrey Craig DEPARTMENTS

- OPENING SHOT 1
- LETTERS 4
- **CURRENTS 14**
- THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM 20
- THE LOWER CASE INSIDE BACK COVER

COVER: GRADY MCFERRIN

"I had thought I graduated seamlessly into the middle class, but at the Post I learned I was a clumsy impostor." — Ivan G. Goldman, p. 50

## CJR

Published by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Dean: Nicholas Lemann

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR** 

Michael Hoyt
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Gloria Cooper

MANAGING EDITOR

Brent Cunningham

ART DIRECTOR

Nancy Novick

Mancy Movici

COPY MANAGER

Tom O'Neill

ASSISTANT EDITORS Mariah Blake

Corey Pein

INTERNS

Rebecca Aronauer

Chris Bodenner

PUBLISHER

Evan Cornog

DEPUTY PUBLISHER

Dennis Giza

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

Louisa Kearney

BUSINESS ASSISTANTS

Kathleen Brow, Mekema Hamilton

WEST COAST EDITOR

Tom Goldstein

Judith Bender

Evan Jenkins

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Russ Baker, James Boylan,

Christopher Hanson, Neil Hickey, Trudy Lieberman, Judith Matloff,

Michael Massing, Douglas McCollam, Bruce Porter, Michael Shapiro,

Bruce Porter, Michael Shapiro, Scott Sherman, Steve Weinberg

ONLINE PROJUCER
Branwynne Kennedy

Branwynne Kenned

MAJOR DONORS
The Ford Foundation

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

DONORS

Cabot Family Charitable Trust

#### COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway

Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027

#### ON THE WEB: www.cjr.org

TO CONTACT US Editorial: (212) 854-1881 e-mail: CJR@columbia.edu Advertising: (212) 854-3958 Business: (212) 854-2716 Fax: (212) 854-8580

SUBSCRIPTIONS: (888) 425-7782

#### LETTERS

#### SEEING THE LIGHT

Chris Mooney's "Blinded by Science" (CJR, November/December) purports to show science journalists how to convey scientific knowledge accurately, while avoiding the pitfalls of seeking "balance" instead. But if balance is the frying pan, Mooney's advice — to go with majority opinion and avoid the "fringe" — is to jump into the proverbial fire.

Mooney begins by examining a 2003 Los Angeles Times article by Scott Gold that denounced a new Texas informedconsent law. The law requires abortion. providers to warn prospective patients about increased risk of future breast cancer (abortion breast-cancer link, or ABC Link). While Mooney calls Gold's article "hard-hitting but accurate," he scolds Times editor John Carroll for criticizing Gold's lack of balance in not printing the views of "some credible scientist who believes in it [the ABC link]." In fact, Gold had interviewed such a scientist - myself - and put my name and some of my views in his story. What Carroll found objectionable - and what Mooney conveniently omits - was the fact that Gold had printed only my political views, not my scientific views on the subject. But according to Mooney, Gold's approach was right because my views had been described in "Physician, a magazine published by a conservative religious group." Mooney apparently thinks that should trip any thinking journalist's fringe alarm.

As to "fringe scientific claims," Mooney advises journalists to exercise "considerable skepticism." Translation: If you're a journalist, be skeptical. But if you're a mere scientist — especially if your religious views are publicly known — better stick with the mainstream consensus, lest you be tarred with Mooney's fringe brush.



In fact, such pressures on scientists to follow the herd can be intense, for a break with the ruling majority can mean the evaporation of government grant funding. What lay, therefore, beneath the easily observable consensus du jour is often a far less monolithic view, especially if the issue is — like abortion — politically loaded. Besides, today's consensus is typically yesterday's fringe theory. Although published studies first showed a smoking-lung cancer link in the 1920s, "mainstream" science did not acknowledge it until the 1950s.

As far as the ABC link itself is concerned, there is no excuse for getting it all wrong, since at least part of the issue is a no-brainer. A full-term pregnancy — but not an aborted pregnancy — lowers a woman's future risk of breast cancer, and all the "mainstream" authorities admit it. Hence, a pregnant woman who chooses the intervention of abortion is left with a higher risk of breast cancer than if she chooses to carry the pregnancy to term. Therefore, any reasonable standard of informed consent would require that abortion providers inform potential patients of this difference in risk,

Columbia Journalism Review (USPS 0804-780) (ISSN 0010-194X) is published bimonthly. Volume XLIII, Number 5 January/February 2005. Copyright © 2005 Columbia University. Subscription rates: one year \$27.95; two years \$41.95. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Postmaster: send Form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review, P.O. Box 578, Mt Morris, IL 61054.

but they don't. That's why states like
Texas now require it by law. But attacking
such states and their supporters for
doing so suggests political — rather than
scientific or journalistic — motives behind Mooney's own foray into "scientific
reporting."

Joel Brind Professor of human biology and endocrinology, Baruch College, CUNY, and president, Breast Cancer Prevention Institute Poughkeepsie, New York

Chris Mooney reminds us that the Scientific Method is based, among other things, "on repeated testing and retesting of an idea." But that's not exactly how climate science works.

Because the world is so large, and so complex, and climate change has a time component measured in centuries, or even hundreds of centuries, climatologsts can't test their theories the way Galileo tested gravity by simultaneously dropping two differently sized balls. They can only take (enough hopefully representative) "samples" and build statistical models. These statistical models can be improved by getting more sample data, and comparing models to reality, but they are still just statistics. And we all know about lies, damned lies, and statistics.

Mooney is spot-on regarding the need for journalists to follow "full disclosure" and report on the backgrounds of contrarian spokesmen. But why only the contrarians? Why not report on how Joe Climatologist is a member of the World Wildlife Fund, and his main source of income is from grants, and he thus has a political and economic impetus for saying that the sky is falling?

Disclosure: While I am a Republican, I am an atheist, try to live rationally, and am not, to my knowledge, associated in any way with any energy company.

Ron Johnson, Jr. Jefferson, Louisiana

#### MISSED DIAGNOSIS

I got to know Jayson Blair in connection with his work covering the New York TV stations, most of which, at one time or

another, have been my clients. About two months ago, I took him on as a client of my public relations agency. It is in that connection that I write this.

Both Seth Mnookin in his book *Hard News* and Michael Hoyt in his review of it (CJR, November/December) miss one critical fact: Jayson is manic-depressive. Untreated manic-depressives often do strange things that make sense only to themselves at the time that they are doing them.

Cetting caught was the best thing that could have happened to him. It eventually got him into treatment, to which he is largely responding well. To imply a larger meaning for American journalism from Jayson's fiasco is asking a lot.

Ted Faraone New York, New York

#### TRANSITORY VALUES

I enjoyed Phil Meyer's thoughts on the increasingly thin gruel being served up as journalism by America's publishers ("Saving Journalism," CJR, November/December). Here in Washington, subway riders like myself now have to battle through Metro-station hawkers trying to give away copies of *The Washington Post*'s free *Express* every workday morning. It's depressing. I hate to start all my workdays saying no — I get plenty of chance to do that once I get into the office.

What makes it even more grating is the fact that I am fighting my way past them to the Post vending machine to spend thirty-five cents on a copy of the "grown-up" newspaper. After I buy it. I get aboard a subway train and clear my seat of discarded, barely read Expresses (technically known as "litter"). Methinks a big part of the solution Meyer seeks is for those of us engaged in print journalism to acknowledge that we are no longer a mass medium. We should declare what we do to be special, important, and worthy of a few coins and stop trying to sell our wares to all eyeballs by creating crass tedium.

> Mark Thompson Kensington, Maryland

#### **DIVISION OF LABORS**

Trudy Lieberman's article, "Imagining Evil" (CJR, September/October), is extremely effective in sending fellow journalists the message that turning a blind eye to homeland security problems is going against the grain of our nation and the journalistic profession. However, since such information is so difficult to get, it is not likely to be dug up by anyone other than journalists who work for such heavyweight news organizations as The New York Times and The Washington Post. Those journalists should use their considerable resources for keeping the public informed about the very hard-to-get stuff. and let the rest of us keep our day jobs informing the public about the usual weather surprises and baseball scores.

> Bonnie Dalrymple Pullman, Washington

#### CORRECTION

The November/December issue contained an incorrect Web address for Chris Mooney, author of the article "Blinded by Science." The correct address is www.ChrisCMooney.com.

#### Scripps Howard Institute on the Environment

May 16-21, 2005

#### University of Colorado at Boulder

Explore critical environmental issues with science and policy experts.

During the one-week program, you'll exam-

ine timely topics such as energy policy, global climate change, and ecosystem management.

The Institute covers the cost of instruction, field trips, lodging and most meals.

#### Application deadline: March 15, 2005

To apply, send a statement about why you want to attend along with a supervisor's letter of support and three work samples to:

> Scripps Howard Institute on the Environment

Center for Environmental Journalism

478 UCB Boulder, CO 80309-0478

fax: 303-492-0969
For full details visit

www.colorado.edu/journalism/cej





Seth Cook gets a goodbye kiss from his friend, nine-year-old Michaela McAvoy of England, on the last night of the Sunshine Foundation's annual progeria reunion.

## How one boy's battle for life captured Seattle's heart.



Reporter
Carol Smith



Photographer Dan Delong

At 11 years of age, Seth Cook is wise beyond his years. Due to a rare illness called progeria, he is aging rapidly and facing death at an early age. Seattle Post-Intelligencer reporter Carol Smith knew the inspirational story of this local boy and his family would connect with readers.

Over the course of a year spent with Seth and his family, Smith and photographer Dan DeLong developed "A Time to Live," which shows the Cook family's courage as they face the tragic progression of progeria. The journalists let readers get an inside look at what life is like for a young boy with an old man's health problems.

They talked to classmates who learned from Seth and to doctors seeking a cure for the disease. This special 20-page section also revealed the touching story of a non-profit organization, the Sunshine Foundation, which brings together progeria victims from around the world once a year. The coverage gained a new dimension on the P-I Web site, where visitors could get to know Seth better through video and audio presentations. It's worth a visit to seattlepi.com/specials/seth to hear Seth tell his story in his own words.

Readers responded to "A Time to Live" in record numbers. By bringing important local stories to the community, Hearst Newspapers deliver excellence every day.





#### EDITORIAL

#### DEFINING BIAS DOWNWARD

Holding Political Power to Account Is Not Some Liberal Plot

eed Irvine, the energetic liberal-bias hunter who died November 16 at eighty-two, wasn't *always* wrong. Irvine founded Accuracy in Media, the conservative press watchdog group, thirty-five years ago. He was stone blind to his

own prejudices, and he could be scurrilous and unfair in his attacks, but he knew something about our major media, most of them based in the urban capitais of what we now call blue states and influenced, naturally, by their context.

Irvine must have been amazed in the end by all the company he had: well-financed bias-busters, slews of books, think tanks, and radio and television icons, all singing his song. This has had the good effect of waking some left-tilting journalists to their sometimes unconscious leanings, pushing them to challenge their presumptions and broaden their reporting. It

has had the bad effect of making other journalists afraid of their own shadow, for fear of the bias cops. And now there's a new challenge.

In the wake of the election the bias symphony is reaching for a crescendo. The new refrain goes this way: aside from John Kerry, the election's other loser was mainstream media. George W. Bush, the theory goes, won despite the strenuous efforts of the press to bring him down. Here's an example of this view, from Tim Graham of *National Review Online*:

Every anti-Bush angle . . . was explored with great ferocity. Almost every week of 2004 was a bad media week for Bush. There was Paul O'Neill Book Week. There was 9/11 Ads in Bad Taste Week. There was Richard Clarke Book Week. There was Bob Woodward Book Week. There were two weeks of Alabama National Guard Whereabouts Hunt. There were four weeks of Abu Ghraib hype . . .

What's disturbing is not the way that Graham is whining into his champagne but his little two-step away from reality. He and others are defining bias downward, as anything that challenges a GOP point of view.

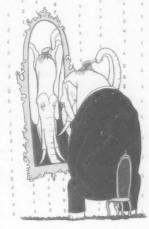
When a Republican former treasury secretary publicly parts company with his president on economic policy, that's a legitimate story fit for national discussion. Ditto for a book by a top antiterrorism expert who seriously argues that the administration

> is blowing the war on terror. Ditto for the need for some attention to the work of Woodward, a quality reporter on the insider perspective (and whose book on the run-up to the war was carefully balanced). An effort to map the young George Bush's record in the Guard, unknown to this day? That's legitimate, too if, of course, it's done right. Abu Ghraib? It was an insult to America's commitment to morality that, if anything, has been undercovered. One can have a legitimate debate about the weight that ought to be given to stories such as these but to suggest they should not be aggressively re-

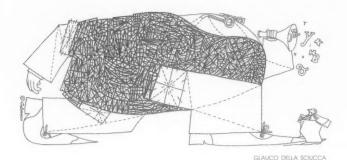
ported is to slip away from the world of real discourse.

So now what? The prospect of four years of competition for the dominant version of reality on all things political is not only depressing — like being tied in a chair in front of an endless loop of *Cross-fire* — but worrisome, because endlessly dueling versions of reality are ultimately unstable. Without some rough agreement on what is significant, citizens will not get the intellectually honest debate that citizenship requires. Journalists, whatever their inner political leanings, must work harder at being honest brokers of information, worthy of respect.

Honest conservatives, meanwhile, should consider a pair of New Year's resolutions: first, recognize that challenging political power and holding it to account is the legitimate role of the press in a democracy, not some liberal plot. Second, swear off defining any story that is uncomfortable to you as an example of liberal bias. Such a tactic probably won't work in the long run, anyway. As somebody once noted, facts are stubborn things.



#### VOICES



BY MARK I. PINSKY

#### AMONG THE EVANGELICALS

How one reporter got religion

ressed to identify a single evangelical Christian who is not a national religious leader, a country music star, a politician, or an athlete, many journalists based outside red states would probably flail around like a desperate quiz show contestant until the name Ned Flanders popped into their minds. Oddly enough, that animated character in The Simpsons wouldn't be such a bad choice. Like many voting Americans, the Flanders family says grace at meals, attends church most Sundays, reads and refers to the Bible, and prays out loud. Amid the lingering bewilderment in the wake of the presidential election, I can sympathize with those of my colleagues still puzzling over the evangelical enigma. It's never easy to parachute into an alien environment and file a coherent story eight hours later. As with a Boston journalist covering the Catholic Church or one in Salt Lake City covering the Mormons, reporting about evangelicals while living in the Sunbelt provides the luxury of home-field advantage, as well as the opportunity to return again and again to the subject.

When I began covering religion for the *Los Angeles Times* in Orange County in 1985, I knew very little about Sunbelt Christianity. A Jew, born in Miami and raised in the New Jersey suburbs, I first read the New Testament in a college course, and only because it was then required at my historically Methodist university. But over a decade at the *Times* covering this growing (and, to me, strange) tribe of people called evangelicals I learned a lot — or so I

thought. Since this was the era of the televangelism scandals, I focused on religious broadcasting, the outlets based in southern California, like Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power* and Paul Crouch's Trinity Broadcasting Network, that knit together the nation's evangelical community. Through them, I reasoned, I could better understand their viewers.

At the time, this top-down approach to the beat seemed logical. I was working in Orange County, but I lived in a quaint, cosmopolitan beach community in Los Angeles County, and so I had little visceral sense of what was happening at the evangelical grass roots in my circulation area. In retrospect, it is clear that I should have been paying closer attention to another, equally important story in my backyard: a little congregation called Saddleback Valley Community Church in southern Orange County, which would grow into one of the nation's most influential megachurches. Its pastor, the Reverend Rick Warren, whom I confess I never sought out to interview, developed the motivational concept of the forty-day "Purpose Driven Church" that is today sweeping the nation's congregations and, in book form, is a fixture on the best-seller lists.

Moving to the other end of the Sunbelt in 1995 to cover religion for the *Orlando Sentinel*, I didn't have the opportunity to make the same mistake. While evangelicals are part of a varied theological landscape in California, they *are* the landscape in Florida: Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, charismatic Catholics, and even many mainline Protestants. Suddenly, I found myself in a very different Orange County. The most ubiquitous bumper sticker was not for a commercial rock station; it was for one devoted to contemporary Christian music. In addition to being

a tourist Mecca, Orlando was becoming a New Jerusalem for international evangelical organizations, much like Colorado Springs. Reflexively, I returned to my top-down ways, making up for lost time by doing articles about influential para-church organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ and Wycliffe Bible Translators that had by then migrated from southern California to central Florida.

But something was different. For the first time in my life, I was living in a sea of believing, faithful Christians, and the cold shock felt like total immersion. As on the West Coast, I learned a lot on the job, interviewing ministers, leaders, and lay people. I attended church services more often than many Christians - some months more often than I attended my own synagogue. But the most intense part of my education came from outside the job, apart from the mediation of a reporter's notebook. At PTA meetings, at Scouts, in the supermarket checkout line, and in my neighborhood I encountered evangelicals simply as people, rather than as subjects or sources of quotes for my stories. Our children went to the same birthday parties. We sat next to each other in the bleachers while the kids played recreational sports. Our family doctor went on frequent mission trips and kept a New Testament in each examining room. In the process, I learned about the Great Commission, the biblical obligation of all Christians to share their faith with the once-born and the unsaved.

Evangelicals were no longer caricatures or abstractions. I learned to interpret their metaphors and read their body language. From personal, day-to-day experience I observed what John Green at the University of Akron has discerned from extensive research: evangelicals were not monolithic nor were they, as The Washington Post infamously characterized them, "poor, uneducated and easy to command." Like Ned Flanders, they are more likely to be overzealous than hypocritical, although there is certainly some of the latter. They don't march in lockstep to what Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell or Focus on the Family's James Dobson tell them, and they hold surprisingly diverse views on many issues. While making common cause politically, their theological differences range from the subtle to the significant. For evangelicals, religion is not just for Sundays - or Election Day.

This epiphany — it would be hard to call it anything else, except maybe a revelation — transformed the way I approached my beat. I discarded the traditional way of structuring my stories. No more, "While some wacko evangelical leaders over here say this, these rational secularists and moderate mainliners over there say that," with an author or academic in the middle tossed in for balance. While sym-

metrical, this is so schematic that it makes the result predictable and unrevealing. Instead, I decided to treat evangelicals as a discrete universe. I started to write about them in a way that would be interesting and informative to my suburban, Sunbelt readers — and to me. That is, "Some evangelicals say this, but others disagree," and why and what that means.

nce I applied this new template, the stories changed. Illuminating fissures and fault lines began to appear. Southern Baptists might oppose women in the pulpit, but Pentecostals did not. Conservative Catholics rejected the use of condoms for birth control or in AIDS prevention, but Protestants did not. Christian backing for Israel and its policies often came with a galling and divisive price tag for American Jewish allies: simultaneous support for apostate Messianics who want to convert their faithful coreligionists. While there is near unanimity opposing gay marriage and abortion among evangelicals, serious and fundamental divisions exist over other issues, including the Iraq war, environmentalism, tax policy - and yes, even civil unions. I know this because it is what the evangelicals I know tell me. An evangelical woman in my wife's book club, a Democrat, jokingly referred to George Bush as "the antichrist."

I would like to say that this hard-earned understanding of evangelicals enabled me to predict the outcome of the recent presidential election, but it didn't. At the same time, neither did the returns leave me as shell-shocked as they did some of my colleagues. And despite the blustering of some leaders, I think I know why grass-roots evangelicals do not feel triumphant about the results. True, in states like Florida they see Republican control of all branches of government, from Tallahassee to Washington, D.C. Conservatives and Christians dominate the AM radio dial, and the Fox News Channel leads the local cable television ratings. But despite all this, many of my evangelical friends and neighbors still feel besieged, beleaguered, and, to some degree, powerless.

The threat they cannot defeat at the polls is a pervasive, popular culture they consider to be, for the most part, a toxic mix of loveless sexuality and senseless violence. As a parent, a media consumer, and — in my heart — a blue-stater, I have to agree with them on this point, adding to the mix only my personal (elitist?) complaint: pop culture's relentless stupidity.

This is not to say that I agree with them on much else, politically or theologically. Yet neither does it keep me from understanding the sincerity of their beliefs, or from reporting them fairly. I may be flattering myself, but over time I think I have developed a relationship of mutual trust and mutual respect

with the evangelical community and its leaders. Of course, that doesn't mean they've given up trying to bring me to Jesus. That's what evangelicals do, it's in their spiritual DNA, and I'm okay with that.

Mark I. Pinsky, a religion reporter at the Orlando Sentinel, is author of The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust, and Pixie Dust and The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World's Most Animated Family.

#### BY JUDITH MATLOFF

#### **COVERING KIDNAP VICTIMS**

The case for restraint

n June 1994, I faced one of the more blurred ethical questions of my career. I was running Reuters's southern Africa editing desk on a quiet Sunday afternoon. The day was so atypically uneventful that I actually had time to write letters. Suddenly a colleague called with some news. A mutual friend from The Associated Press, Tina Susman, had been taken hostage in Somalia. The caller lowered his voice. "Could you please not publish anything?" he asked. The AP, he explained, feared that publicity could endanger negotiations for Susman's release.

My first thought was, "Of course." Our familial press corps had been traumatized by the slaughter of three other colleagues in Somalia. Having experienced close calls myself, I projected myself into Susman's terrifying situation — blindfolded and powerless. Who wouldn't want to protect Tina?

But the professional in me felt uneasy. Shouldn't we report that an American reporter had been seized? Sure, Susman was a buddy; she had been to my house and was dating a photographer in my office. But weren't we suppressing the news solely because we knew her? Silence implied a double standard. After all, we routinely covered the abductions of aid workers. Shouldn't we extend the same courtesy of an embargo to someone of another profession?

Protocol resolved my quandary; in good conscience I passed on AP's request to my supervisor. The embargo orchestrated by the AP had grown to fifteen news organizations, and with the words, "Tina is a close personal friend," my boss declared that Reuters would join it.

After twenty days, Susman was freed unharmed. The dilemma receded from my thoughts — until last October, when I received an e-mail from none other than Susman. She informed me that a young freelance photographer from Oklahoma, Paul Taggart, had been pulled from a car in Baghdad. The press corps there,

with apparent approval of editors back home, had agreed to a collective silence while his release was sought. They feared that reporting on the case would give the kidnappers their desired publicity, and end with yet another sinister beheading video.

Perhaps twenty news organizations took part in the embargo, including al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi TV, and al-Arabiya. Only a stringer from *The Washington Times* didn't respect it, but his story so distorted the facts that little harm was done. The news cartel treated Taggart's liberation, after two days in captivity, with equal discretion. Just a handful of media organizations reported on his release, and their dispatches were tersely worded.

Since October, I've been mulling over the practice of not reporting on kidnapped colleagues. I keep returning to a few questions: Are we doing a disservice to the public by withholding information? Does an embargo entail censorship and, just as bad, favoritism?

Here's where I came down: no story is worth a life, and news should be withheld if we can reasonably assume that we could save a hostage - fellow journalist or anyone else - and make sure that we can get the facts out eventually. We should by no means suppress reporting on troubling stories such as the beheadings in Iraq. But we must give equal treatment to civilians from other professions who have been taken hostage, something that hasn't been addressed adequately so far. There was no similar embargo on news for aid workers or contractors kidnapped in Iraq. That might be because their employers didn't request silence, or the news got out before they could. But we should be wary of preferential treatment - an issue that I know makes editors squirm - and be as conscientious about an abducted Turkish truck driver as a kidnapped photographer from Tulsa. Do we even consider calling fellow journalists and asking, "Are we endangering a life by publishing this story?"

By saying this, I realize that I'm inviting charges of censorship. Some will argue that the press should honestly show war's consequences. If people get kidnapped, it's news. But embargoing news isn't really censorship, in that the information will eventually be printed. It's simply making a call about when to publish.

The fact remains that the customary ethics that govern our profession grow murky when one is covering an armed conflict. Professional detachment melts away with the prospect of saving a fellow human. I've seen cameramen put down their lenses to avoid inciting mob violence. Some journalists who

felt compelled to testify at war crimes tribunals would never have done so in a domestic court. You're essentially paying a bribe when you furnish Marlboros at an armed roadblock, but the alternative could mean death. Following this logic, I don't see anything wrong with holding a story for a few days or weeks to protect someone. The news will ultimately get out.

The British police have advocated a similar position, according to Stephen Claypole, the chief executive officer of World Picture News, for whom Taggart was working when he was captured. For many years, Scotland Yard discouraged reporters from publishing the details of criminal kidnappings while they were under way. The full story could be printed once the abductions ended. The police argued that such blackouts helped prevent violence and similar kidnappings.

Taking this argument further, I'd call for limiting coverage of those barbaric snuff videos coming out of Iraq. Giving beheadings front-page treatment or broadcasting scenes of hostages begging for their lives plays right into the abductors' hands. The news embargo on Susman's capture extended to a tape that showed her kneeling before her masked captors. We should exercise similar discipline on such propaganda tools today.

That said, I realize that it's impossible to generalize about the correctness of sitting on news about civilian hostages. In retrospect, Susman's captors just wanted money, so coverage probably wouldn't have jeopardized her release. (Ransom wasn't paid.) At the time, we were unsure of the captors' demands, so we were right to be safe. Sometimes publicity can help resolve a kidnapping, though it might have made Taggart's situation worse since Iraqi captors generally use their victims for propaganda purposes. Thus, it was wise to keep a lid on news while his freedom was being negotiated. At the same time, it would have been futile for the American press to withhold coverage of the beheading of hostages in Iraq already aired on al-Jazeera.

More than 150 foreigners have been kidnapped in Iraq. It's likely more will be taken. Practically, it would be hard to get the disparate press corps to agree to exercise restraint in covering all such stories. Consensus is often elusive during wartime, precisely because traditional ethics fade away. For every journalist who drives bleeding victims to the hospital, you'll find another who doesn't want to influence the course of events. Some intervene in beatings, others look away. Moreover, given the changes in technology and the media industry, it's harder to sit on a story today than it was in 1994. The hostage-takers

know how to exploit the voracious 24-hour news cycle: If their gruesome videos fail to attract coverage from mainstream networks and papers, they can always turn to bloggers, wagering that the noise generated on the Web is enough to bait the mainstream press into reporting on the videos.

But with the number of news organizations based in Baghdad dwindling, it could be less difficult to get everyone to agree on a common strategy, one that errs on the side of caution when it comes to reporting on kidnap victims. The diverse press corps — Arabic and Western alike — demonstrated with the Taggart case that it can pull together on stories. We should see more such efforts for those hostages who aren't our colleagues.

There is no simple formula for deciding whether to report on a hostage case, in Iraq or anywhere else. But the general rule should be to ask ourselves whether we have made a serious effort to determine whether publicity would put the victim at risk when we report on the capture of anyone other than a press colleague. Are we implicitly responsible for someone's death by maintaining a double standard? Or do we just report the news and find out later?

Judith Matloff teaches a course on war reporting at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.

#### AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

and the

#### **CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY**

are proud to announce the first

## Fellowship in Investigative Journalism

Earn a Master's in journalism at AU's School of Communication

Pursue investigative projects at CPI

Full tuition scholarship plus \$24,000 stipend

For journalists with at least four years' experience

Applications due: March 15, 2005 For more information: Ezra Krumhansl

Director of Graduate Recruitment 202-885-3940 or ekrum@american.edu

www.soc.american.edu

S C H O O L O F

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

#### THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

www.publicintegrity.org

eeo/a

DART to Editor & Publisher, for a worrisome sign of recidivism. Back in 1998, the trade magazine announced to ethicists' cheers that as part of its program in self-improvement, it was discontinuing its eighty-year practice of selling fall — despite an impressive to have released itself from that promise on a technicality. While E&P's October cover indeed remained intact, it was completely obscured by a false one - an ad for the weekly Life, now available "through the power of newspapers" below the imprimatur of the venerable E&P logo.

LAUREL to the Arizona Daily Star, for building a small oasis in a desert of dry statistics. As the number of bodies of illegal immigrants found at the state's southern border crossings continues to mount, and as the news of those discoveries grows ever more routine, the Star now gathers and posts on its Web site every vital fact and figure it can possibly unearth about each and every one of those luckless individuals. Drawn from records provided by law enforcement officials, county medical examiners, and Mexican government agencies, the unusual database, searchable without cost by name, age, or hometown, includes information on when and where the body was found ("2 miles east of San Miguel Vil-

Morales Dam"), whether there was a name ("unidentified woman"; "Aurelio Torres Boto"; "unidentified man"), and the cause of death ("exposure"; "heat stroke"; "dehydration"; "drowning"). And somewhere on the horizon: its cover to advertisers. But this the things they carried. "Every week I receive calls record editorially — it appears from someone looking for a lost relative," said Michael Marizco, the border reporter who gathers the data, "and the sad truth is, that person is probably dead . . . . It's my hope that the database will help people find their rela-

discussion ended, Alex Chadwick, the program's host, loftily informed listeners that it was NPR's policy to not report such results - then promptly announced that they would in fact be posted, as they became available, by Day to Day's new partner. "You can check there throughout the day," Chadwick suggested helpfully, "at Slate.com."

LAUREL to American Public Media, for an unsentimental investigative journey. In a two-part series School of Journalism. Landing hard on the rules that let senators and representatives unreservedly avail themselves of some fourteen million dollars' worth of Florida golf games and Carolina beaches, California spas and Las Vegas pools, Swedish massages and London shows, the report provided an illuminating map of how the influence-buyers spend their money - and how our lawmakers spend their time.

#### NPR WAS HAVING ITS ETHICAL CAKE AND EATING IT TOO

peace with a proper burial." Also, and not incidentally, the ed on its Web site, the netpaper's soaring tally - 221 such deaths for the twelve months ended September 2004, as opposed to the smaller number of 172 deaths officially reported by the U.S. Border Patrol gives to the public a truer, if grimmer perspective.

DART to National Public Radio, for having its ethical cake and eating it too. As part of its Election Day coverage, the network's program Day to Day aired a brief discussion on the issue of reporting the results of exit interviews before the polls had closed and the potential of such reports to lage"; "Colorado River at affect the outcome. When the from Northwestern's Medill

tives and give them some aired on Marketplace, and in an exhaustive database postwork detailed the frequent flights to faraway places made by every member of the House and Senate (sometimes with spouse and kids) from 2000 to 2004, along with the names of the corporations, lobbvists, universities, think tanks, and other specialinterest groups that privately picked up the tab. Produced by American Radio Works, the September report was based on an analysis of thousands of the required handwritten travel-disclosure forms packed away in the bowels of the Capitol Building in Washington and catalogued by a team of graduate students

#### LAUREL & DART

to The Buffalo News. for going so far - but only. The paper ran a highly favorable review of a local gadfly's selfpublished book, recommending it to "anyone concerned about Buffalo's political leadership" and even helpfully listing the bookshops and Web sites where it could be bought. But the review made no mention whatsoever of The Buffalo News itself, which the book cites pointedly in its indictment of that leadership. "What has The Buffalo News done for the last forty years while our economy has been steadily declining," goes one passage that escaped the review's attention, "but support incumbent politicians and the numercus failed plans, schemes, and scams of the local power elite?"

Darts and Laurels is written by Gloria Cooper cie's deputy executive editor. Nominations: gc15@columbia.edu; 212-854-1887.

#### STATE OF THE ART

#### INTO THE BREACH . . . RIDE THE NATION'S OMBUDSMEN

ate in 2003, *The New York Times*, against all its inclinations but desperate to exorcise the ghost of Jayson Blair, cracked open its door to the alien presence of a public editor. The message to readers was clear: the *Times* would do anything — yes, even *that* — to regain their shaken trust.

of *The Palm Beach Post*, Gina Lubrano of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, Connie Coyne of *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Their columns make clear their respect for readers' feelings even as they go on to explain, gently, firmly, and sometimes with eloquence, how the publication of the admittedly awful photo serves the

Building institutional credibility through the person of an in-

dependent intermediary was hardly a new idea. When Daniel Okrent took that historic job, he swelled to thirty-nine the U.S. ranks of the Organization of News Ombudsmen (appropriately, ONO), a dedicated band of seasoned journalists in similar service around the country at outlets big and small, mostly (though not exclusively) newspapers. Together they carry forward a movement that began some forty years ago in response to the public's alarming disaffection with an unaccountable press. Whatever the nuances of their various titles — reader representative, public

ment of the news business.

editor, reader advocate, ombudsman -

they are, in effect, the complaint depart-

The complaints, for the most part, are ordinary, and easily dispatched: This is why the paper was delayed, why the ink stains the fingers, why the late sports scores have vanished, why the comic strip was dropped. But there is nothing ordinary about the war in Iraq, nothing ordinary about the fury that the war - or, more precisely, that the news of the war has unleashed upon its messengers. Layered as the criticisms are with frustration and fear, politics and patriotism, hate and hope, the relentless expressions of outrage and disgust present to the nation's ombudsmen an unprecedented challenge. To be sure, some ombudsmen simply register the readers' charges, dutifully record an editor's reply, and let it go at that, while a few have pressed the newsroom to hurry up and find the good news readers have been demanding. But the best

For example, the visceral reaction, including canceled subscriptions, aroused by those now-iconic photographs of the antiwar protests, of the flag-draped coffins of American soldiers coming home, of the bodies hanging from the Falluja bridge, of the torture at Abu Ghraib, of the beheading of Nicholas Berg — photos relentlessly attacked as "offensive," "intrusive," "unpatriotic," sensationalistic," "sadistic," "pornographic," or worse — has been thoughtfully addressed by, among others, Don Wycliff of the *Chicago Tribune*, C.B. Hanif

ombudsmen have recognized the opportunity for civic instruc-

tion - of readers and newsroom alike - and grasped it.

of *The Palm Beach Post*, Gina Lubrano of *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, Connie Coyne of *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Their columns make clear their respect for readers' feelings even as they go on to explain, gently, firmly, and sometimes with eloquence, how the publication of the admittedly awful photo serves the public interest and therefore American democracy. By the same token, Michael Getler has rebuked *The Washington Post* for its buried placement of the protest story, Pam Platt the Louisville *Courier-Journal* for not leading the charge against government censorship of the coffin photos, Tony Marcano *The Sacramento Bee* for waiting a week to run a picture of Abu Chraib. "I would urge both editors and readers," Mar-

cano wrote, "to weigh the obscenity of the images against the obscenity of silence and denial in the face of injustice."

Okrent, for his part, had been steadily establishing his bona fides in all manner of significant topics unrelated to Iraq when he decided this spring to break his self-imposed rule against commenting on journalism produced by the Times before his tenure began. His May 30 examination of the paper's overly credulous prewar reporting on weapons of mass destruction had been started weeks before, and was published only days after, the appearance of an editors' note acknowledging the Times's less than rigorous coverage. Okrent's analysis went deeper, weighing the practices that encouraged the lapses, naming the names that the editors had not, and concluding that the failure was "institutional." Such criticisms soon found their way into the columns of other ombuds-

men — Getler, for instance, faulting the *Post* for not giving more prominence to dissenting reports on WMD; others, particularly those whose newspapers had picked up the *Times*'s original WMD reports, stressing a newly felt need for skepticism. Indeed, Okrent's column was nothing less than perfect proof of the *Times*'s paradoxically wise judgment — both in opening its door to a first-class ombudsman and in its gut resistance to that move. As the *Times* is learning every day, and as those other enlightened news organizations that support an ombudsman can testify, readers' trust does not come cheap.

Meanwhile, complaints continue, centering now not only on how the grievous injuries and horrifying deaths — of soldiers and civilians, Americans and Iraqis — should be covered, but *whether*. Like the war, and the news of the war, the ombudsmen's work goes on. — *Gloria Cooper* 

#### MEDIA 2004: SOME NOT-SO-HIGH POINTS

No one will say this was the best year American journalism has ever seen. We'll let the Pulitzer committee take care of the honors; here is CJR's year-end review of what some would rather forget.

GOING OUT

WITH A BANG AWARD

**Winner:** Bob Edwards. If the 25,000 fans who signed the online "Save Bob Edwards" petition all buy satellite radios, NPR is doomed.

**Runner-up:** Howell Raines. Nothing less than a 21,000-word *Atlantic* essay could expose how everyone else was wrong.



AHEAD OF ITS TIME AWARD Winner: WOIO Cleveland anchor Sharon Reed appears naked and unblurred, and the station draws record ratings. Action Nudes at Fleven.

**Runner-up:** Lewis Lapham, for preemptively describing the GOP convention in the past tense.

BIGGEST LIBERAL MEDIA FANTASY

Winner: Kerry/McCain '04.
Then, the lion laid down with
the lamb, the frog turned into a
prince, and they all lived happily

ever after.

Runner-up: The "Bush Bulge." All that effort to find Bush's wire, and not a word on UFOs — where's

the justice?

BIGGEST CONSERVATIVE MEDIA FANTASY Winner: Ronald Reagan on the \$10 bill. Next, a national monument to Bill Buckley's sailboat.

Runner-up: All that good news coming out of Iraq.

BIGGEST BIPARTISAN MEDIA FANTASY Hillary Clinton '08.

LEAST ANONYMOUS SOURCE Michael Scheurer, a.k.a.
"Anonymous." He was on the outs at the CIA after writing a book called *Imperial Hubris* and complaining to journalists about the Keystone Kops aspect of the hunt for bin Laden.

BEST ON-AIR SCRAP

Winner: Tucker Carlson vs. Jon Stewart. Someday, your children will ask, "Where were you when

"Where were you when Jon Stewart called Tucker Carlson a 'dick'?"

**Runner-up:** Zell Miller vs. Chris Matthews. Fisticuffs? Swords? Or pistols at ten paces?

MOST EXCLUSIVE EXCLUSIVE
The New York Post's front-page
Dick Gephardt-for-VP scoop.
Someone's been phoning in
headlines again!

MOST POWERFUL MEDIA MACHINE

Winner: Google.

Runner-up: Jim Romenesko.

MOST UNFORTUNATE CHRISTENING

Winner: "Blog." Runner-up: Anything "for Truth."

LEAST ACCURATE
PREDICTION (SPORTS)

Winner: The Red Sox must lose.
Runner-up: Tiger Woods
can't lose.

LEAST ACCURATE PREDICTION (POLITICS)

Winner: The National Election Pool's exit polls. Can't wait to see the "fix" devised for 2008 third time's a charm, folks.

**Runner-up:** Howard Dean as the Democratic frontrunner.



MATT DRUDGE'S FINEST HOUR

Reporting Election Day exit polls, Drudge noted, "Both camps urge caution."



BEST SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING The "Kerry intern."

BEST NOTHING OUT OF SOMETHING Bush's National Guard service.

BEST BUSH QUOTE
REGARDING THE PRESS

Winner: "Now that I've got the will of the people at my back, I'm going to start enforcing the one-question rule."

**Runner-up:** "I'm aware if there is yet another story about X, Y, Z

in the newspaper . . . I'm aware if there is seven straight days of a certain news story being run. I'm aware if there is three days of something."





MOST OBVIOUSLY
REVILED FIGURE
Tie: Bob Novak/Ralph Nader

MOST DUBIOUS NYT TREND STORY

Winner: People eat cereal (November 14, A1).

Runners-up: Punk Republicans (March 21), People live in basements (February 25), people have iPods (February 15, August 26, November 6, etc.).

FUNNIEST RUNNING GAG Winner: The Richard Perle Libel Watch, by *Slate*'s Jack Shafer. Perle waited a full year before deciding not to sue Sy Hersh. Runner-up: Larry King.

LEAST WARRANTED

"News Corp.'s Fox News was incorrectly described in a page-one article yesterday as being sympathetic to the Bush cause." (WSJ, October 26)

MOST EMBARRASSING CORRECTION W.M.D.

Compiled by Corey Pein.
Thanks to Romenesko's archives
and DayPop.com, cur's interns,
and the staff of CJR Dally.

- 12.5: Years the dissident Liu Jingsheng spent in Chinese prison for publishing "counter-revolutionary propaganda."
- 2: Number of American journalists, as of December, who face prison for protecting sources.
- 0: Number of U.S. newspapers with a permanent prison beat
- 1,470,045: Number of Americans in prison for any crime.
- 35,000: Copies of the pro-opposition paper Tviy Vybir seized by Ukrainian police during November's disputed elections.
- 100,000: Number of nonexistent "ghost readers" of Newsday in the year beginning September 2002.
- 17: Percent of the paper's circulation they represented.
- 14,000: Number of requests to England's Guardian for Clark County, Ohio, addresses, in the paper's write-to-a-voter campaign.
- 60: Number of days, beginning November 11, with a "state of emergency," during which Iraq's interim government ordered news outlets to "set aside space" for the official line.
- 3: Years after the end of the Taliban's television ban that Hamid Karzai's government banned cable television.
- 20: Estimated number of cable operators in Kabul.
- 99.8: Percent of indecency complaints to the FCC in 2003 that were filed by Brent Bozell's group. The Parents Television Council
- \$14.99: Price, plus shipping and handling, of TV-B-Gone, a keychain device that turns off any television in range.

Sources: RSF. Guardian, Washington Post. Reuters. AP. Mediaweek. Research by Sarah Dalsimer.

#### FOLLOW THE MONEY



hat old reporter's dictum is also an excuse to ignore the afflicted. Research by the Harvard fellow Ethan Zuckerman suggests that the amount of press attention a country gets depends on how rich it is. Since June 2003, Zuckerman has mined the daily Web output of big outlets like The Washington Post, The New York Times, and CNN, as well as aggregator sites like Google News. Though the numbers are imprecise, he found that coverage in the

American press correlates more closely to a country's gross domestic product and imports than to, say, its military strength or population. Japan and Nigeria have similar populations — but Japan grabs about seven times the mentions. So what? Think of your health. Zuckerman notes that Al Qaeda based itself in poor countries where the West wasn't looking. See the ongoing research at http://h2odev.law.harvard.edu/ ezuckerman - C.P.

#### SOUND BITE

- " was punished for six months, forced to work on a pig farm, for forgetting to write the last syllable of Kim Jong-II."
  - A former North Korean TV journalist quoted in the 2004 worldwide press freedom index, by Reporters Without Borders

#### WHERE DO THESE NUMBERS COME FROM?

One piece is datelined Saigon, the other, Baghdad. The body count - flawed fixture of the five o'clock follies - has returned. In Vietnam, of course, such counts turned out to be wildly inaccurate. We hope today's journalists remember what their predecessors learned at great cost: be very skeptical of official reports. - C.P.

March 24, 1967: The number of American and enemy combat casualties in Vietnam set records last. week, a United States military spokesman reported tonight. American losses totaled 2.092 -211 killed, 1,874 wounded, and 7 missing. The enemy lost 2,675 killed (NYT)

November 19, 2004: Lt. Gen. John Sattler, commander of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, said the U.S. casualty toll in the Falluja offensive stood at 51 dead and about 425 wounded. An estimated 1.200 insurgents have been killed, with about 1.025 enemy fighters detained. the military says. (AP)



#### LANGUAGE CORNER

TROOPS AND TROUPERS

■rom Hannah Feldman, assistant associate editor theatrical company (usually traveling, in a troupe) it's been plaguing me":

Is someone who perseveres in the face of difficulty a real trooper, "akin to calling someone a brave little soldier," or a real trouper, "a professional performer for whom the show must go on, no matter what?"

It's the latter, as Feldman suspected. Spelled with a "u." and accompanied by an adjective or standing alone, "trouper" denotes a member of a

of Baltimore Magazine, a "small question, but and has come to mean someone who keeps plugging away even when things go sour.

> The double "o" spelling is for a soldier - particularly in the cavalry, as in "F Troop" - or, most commonly in this country, a state police officer. If one of those were to soldier on under tough circumstances, we might say, "The trooper was a real trouper." Or we might not. - Evan Jenkins

(eienk35@aol.com) A lot more about writing is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, www.cjr.org.

## **Announcing**

Journalism

**Deadline for entries:** March 15, 2005

The Risser Prize is sponsored by the John S. Knight **Fellowships for Professional Journalists and the Center** for the Study of the North American West, both at Stanford University.

The prize will be given in the name of the director emeritus of the John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional Journalists at Stanford University. James V. Risser is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who wrote incisively about environmental issues

> and who has a particular interest in those issues as they affect the West



The North American West shares some environmental problems with the rest of the continent, but many of its water,

resource, land use and wildlife issues occur only in this region. The James V. Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism, inaugurated this year, will recognize excellence in reporting on these problems by print, broadcast and online journalists.

The award is for work published or broadcast during 2004. The winner will receive a \$3,000 prize and participate in a public symposium at Stanford with journalists, academics and others whose work focuses on Western environmental issues.

For more information about the contest, details about submitting entries or other questions:

lames V. Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism P.O. Box 20423 Stanford, CA 94309-0423 http://risserprize.stanford.edu/ risserprize@lists.stanford.edu

#### on the job

## THE HOWLER'S QUIET MOMENT

#### BY STEVE TWOMEY

ow bere's a headline: The Daily Howler believes the media did better in 2004? Bob Somerby, idling at a restaurant in Baltimore, not only says campaign coverage ticked upward last fall but suggests he might scale back the Howler, the Web site where he eviscerates what he unlovingly calls "your press corps."

Should we conclude the media have reformed? His work here is done?

We should not.

Bob Somerby needs no introduction, of course, unless your days are spent solely in the brick-and-mortar world, in which case he is, well, Who is he again? "I've never followed this blog," says David M. Halbfinger, a political reporter for The New York Times whom the Howler has mocked but who didn't know it, "and am pretty sure I don't know anyone who does."

In the parallel dimension of cyberspace, however, Somerby is a birth father of digital media-watching, the sarcastic iconoclast whose ravings about how reporters treated Al Gore four years ago will wind up in books, or at least bis book about the 2000 contest, which is nearly done. There aren't armies of Somerby readers the Howler hasn't the reach of a Daily Kos or an Instapundit — but his readers have the zeal of the converted, laughing along with him at the idea that your press corps is as tough as it thinks it is, or as liberal as charged.

"Among people who are aware of how badly our media are broken; how shallow and lazy their reporting is, and how completely awash in conservative misinformation it is, I think Somerby is well known and widely

Bob Somerby, Media Scourge, Considers His Next Crusade



read," says David Brock, the right-wing-turned-left author who founded the Web site Media Matters for America.

When he began, back in the Clinton era, Somerby was pretty much alone in hunting journalistic malfeasance with a blog and a liberal take. Now everybody's a critic, and although no one resembles the Howler, he doesn't care to be a redundant voice. He frets about his tone, too, and about income. He doesn't make any, not from the Howler. Most likely, he says, he'll be writing shorter columns about the media. But not because there's less to write. Your press corps wasn't as bad last fall, 'tis true. But in Somerby's view, it remained hapless, and worse. "I find their conduct repulsive," he says.

Somerby, fifty-seven, is the kind of media writer made possible only by the Internet. His major at Harvard, where he had a roommate from Tennessee named Gore, was the always useful subject of philosophy. He became a public school teacher, then a comedian, but never a reporter or editor. Although the Howler often mentions its "entire staff" at "world headquarters," it's all just Somerby, who lives alone in a row house in the Bolton Hill neighborhood of Baltimore. Cringing at the marketing necessary to make the Howler a going concern, as some

blogs are, Somerby doesn't have ads, grants, or contributions. He survives on stand-up comedy gigs for corporations and professional organizations.

The site (dailyhowler.com) mucks in one place only: political coverage, and it's a raging stew of incredulity and bile, exclamation points and italics, and copious quantities of transcripts and extended quotations, the product of deep dives into Lexis-Nexis and of Somerby's mania for taping TV chat shows. It oozes contempt for the affluent echelons of journalism whose members are, at least at Howler headquarters, too eager to adopt "scripts" about candidates (Bush is dumb! Kerry's French!), too eager to short-shrift complexity, too cowed to point out politicians' lies and too clubby to publicize each other's mistakes. They are not the courageous, serious guardians that democracy demands.

"He just gets so angry at them, being so irresponsible," says a close friend, Tim Howe, a longtime Democratic campaigner and now a producer of comedy shows. Somerby, who Howe says is the smartest and most honest person he knows, feels someone must spotlight the failures. "Bob is a good citizen," Howe says. "Isn't that the responsibility of a good citizen?"

n the flesh and in e-mail exchanges, Somerby comes across as not angry at all, actually. Sitting at a Mexican place, he is exceedingly low-voltage, a man of ruddy face, gray beard, and less hair than his Web site photo. Mostly, he says, he is amused. A great human conceit is that "we are so smart," he says, yet reporters seem incapable of treating problems and politics in intelligent ways. "It's not about newspapers," he says of *The Daily Howler*. "It's about whether humans can do democracy. I find it very funny."

Funny to him, maybe.

The *Howler* can be nitpicky, obsessive, naive, and so brutal that Somerby risks relegation to the ranks of

cranks. Some regular targets (there are oh, so many) strongly resent being accused of conscious efforts to advance agendas or take down candidates, rather than of simple mistakes or bad judgment. Ceci Connolly, a *Washington Post* reporter whom Somerby saw as a leader of a cabal determined to undermine Gore's candidacy, says she is sure he "had legitimate points and observations" about stories, but the *Howler* was "personal, it was nasty, it leaped to conclusions about me and my colleagues and our motivations."

Somerby's indictments of journalism are overly broad, too. After all, many fine reporters in Washington do revelatory, probing work. Even in the blogosphere, he is sometimes regarded as a bit much.

"I appreciate what he does," wrote "Jim" during a discussion of blogging on *The Washington Monthly*'s Web site in September, "but seriously, if I read him for more than a few days in a row, I want to scream, 'We. got. it. the first 8,000 times you wrote it, our press is deeply dysfunctional. Move on. PLEASE.'

But Dan Kennedy, the media critic of *The Boston Phoenix*, says Somerby is "the best close reader in the media today," the most adept at parsing a story for faulty logic, sloppy research, omissions, writing tricks, and the degree to which its author swallowed somebody's spin. Kennedy, a latecomer to the *Howler*, says that when he finally read it regularly, "the scales were lifted from my eyes: 'Good Lord, this guy is amazing,'"

A sample?

In what seemed a fine "gotcha" piece on February 26, 2004, *The Washington Post* reported that Kerry "accepted money and fundraising assistance from top executives" of companies that had shifted operations overseas, even though the candidate had been decrying such "Benedict Arnold" behavior. But in the third paragraph came amplifications that irritated the *Howler*. The contributions were not only from top executives, but from "employees." And not only from people at companies that had relocated but from people at firms that "helped" companies relocate but had not done so themselves. And the total contribution from all these sources was about \$140,000.

It was "plainly absurd," Somerby wrote, to chastise Kerry for accepting contributions from employees — as opposed to top executives — because they "have *nothing to do* with decisions made by the firms for which they work." He said \$140,000 is "a stunningly trivial amount," given that Kerry raised \$30 million. And including people from firms that had "helped" companies move offshore but had not themselves was a "sleight of hand."

On August 13, *The New York Times* reported that Vice President Dick Cheney had belittled Kerry for promising a "more sensitive" war on terrorism. The enemy had to be killed, Cheney had said, not "treated more sensitively." The *Times* article, written by Jodi Wilgoren, said the Kerry camp, in reply, had accused Cheney of taking a comment out of context. The *Howler* howled:

Sensible readers settled back, expecting to learn what that meant. But Wilgoren never explained what the Kerry camp meant — and she never quoted what Kerry originally said! What exactly did Kerry say about the need for a 'sensitive war'? Today, *The New York Times* omits his disputed comment — the troubling comment that produced this big flap.

But then, *The Washington Post* omits Kerry's comment as well. Indeed, it's almost impossible, in today's papers, to learn what Kerry actually said. What remark was Cheney savaging? What had Kerry actually said? Slumbering, bumbling, burbling and snoring, your national

'press corps' forgot to tell you. They repeated all of Cheney's attacks. But attacks against what? *They don't tell!* 

So Somerby told. He quoted at length from the Kerry remarks that Cheney had zinged. And the context was unmistakable: In calling for a more "sensitive war on terror," Kerry meant only that the United States had to be more attuned to the desires of its allies, not that it had to baby terrorists.

Wilgoren's take? Should she have included Kerry's actual words? "I thought that was a decent point," she says.

Somerby often has one. It's why he has value. But Howler shots can be cheap, too.

An example: During the campaign, the columnist Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* ridiculed Kerry for allegedly telling a Wisconsin crowd, "Who among us doesn't like NASCAR?" a phrasing that smacked of out-of-touchness. What Kerry had actually said, though, was "there isn't one of us here who doesn't like NASCAR," a more everyday way to say it. The discrepancy led Somerby to write that Dowd had "invented" a "fake NASCAR quote."

But farther into Somerby's piece, readers learned that an investigation by the Web site *Slate* found Dowd hadn't invented a thing. She had gotten the bad quote from a *Times* reporter who had been at the rally but incorrectly remembered what Kerry had said.

Another: In April, Wilgoren wrote about a Kerry appearance on *Meet The Press* in which the candidate answered three questions with "it depends." The remarks would "provide new fodder for Republican attacks on Mr. Kerry for avoiding direct questions," Wilgoren wrote.

Somerby blistered her for parroting Republican spin. But her story never said Kerry had dodged questions, only that the Bush campaign would *say* he had.

Of late, his own blitzkrieg approach sometimes troubles the author. In the beginning, he was more polite, Somerby explains, but that went nowhere with your press corps. "And increasingly, I think they just have to be yelled at," Somerby says. But when told reporters are upset when he pins motives on their articles, Somerby replies via e-mail, "You're raising a good point." He shouldn't do that, he says; he can't read minds. "I'm tired of my all-seeing pose."

eyond that, Somerby seems to be running low on passion. He cared deeply about press coverage of the 2000 election because he thought it was obvious that the media applied a tougher standard to Gore than to Bush, in complete contravention of the allegation that reporters slant left.

Kerry, however, was not Gored. The media were "not making things up this time." And at the eleventh hour last fall, Somerby wrote with astonishment that the media seemed to be chewing a substantive issue, namely, what had happened to tons of Iraqi explosives. Four years earlier, the last-minute topic was an inane one about an ancient George W. Bush arrest for DUI. Why the improvement over 2000?

"Who knows?" Somerby says. "Maybe the thought that Web cats were going to yell at them very loud helped keep it under control this time."

Or maybe not.

Somerby cannot seem to decide whether he matters. In the blogosphere, he probably does. In October, the *Howler* was ranked 115 out of 15,788 Weblogs being tracked by *The Truth Laid Bear*, a Web site that gauges a blog's stature by how often other sites provide links to it.

But does Somerby — or any blogger — influence newsrooms? Scott Kraft, national editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, doesn't read the 'I don't think he's having a tremendous impact,' says a friend. 'For one thing, he never runs out of targets.'

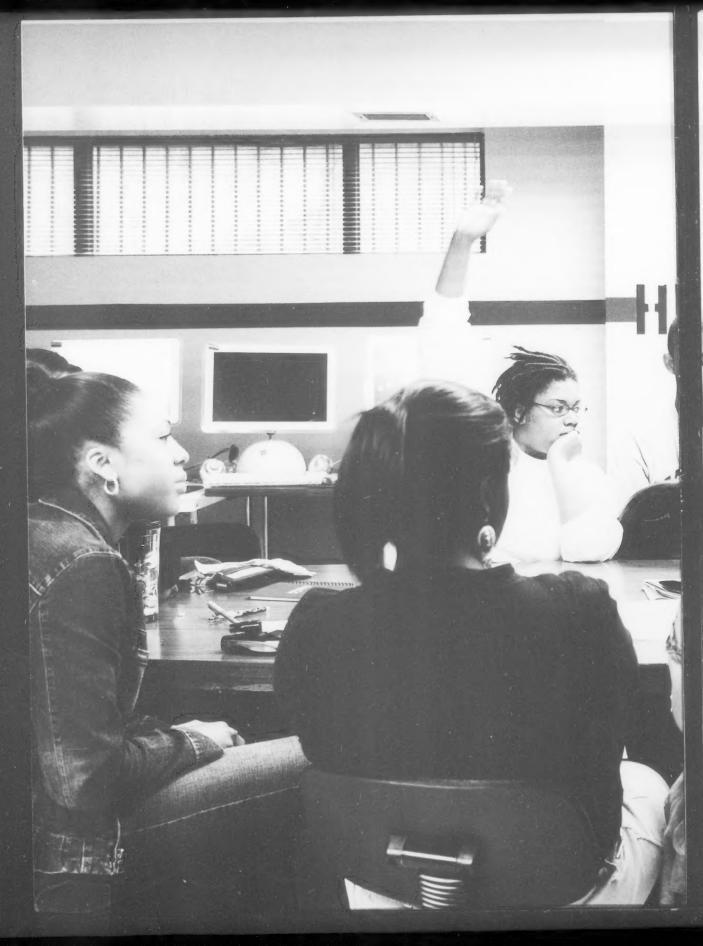
Howler. "You know," Kraft says, "there is so much noise on the Internet that I just don't have the time to tune into everything." He is hardly the only prominent member of the profession to confess that the Howler is not on the radar. Wilgoren says her editors at The New York Times have never mentioned Somerby or anything he wrote about her coverage.

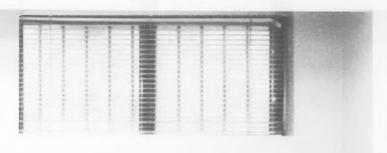
"I don't think he's having a tremendous impact," says a Somerby friend, Gene Lyons, the Arkansas political columnist, co-author of *The Hunting of the President* and author of *Fools for Scandal.*" For one thing, he never runs out of targets."

With the start of the new year, Somerby, who says he needs to earn money, will join the lecture circuit, talking about how "liberal bias ain't what it used to be." He won't kill the *Howler*, he says, but he will probably write shorter pieces, and he might change the tone.

Or he might change topics altogether. The sins of the media are well noted now. He has something else in mind: "No one ever discusses the public, except to say how brilliant, wise, and far-seeing they are," Somerby says. "The press is getting beat on pretty good right now. The public still tends to get a polite pass."

Steve Twomey is a former reporter and editor at The Washington Post.









FUBU

III

THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

*The Hilltop*, Howard University Washington, D.C.

PHOTO BY SEAN HEMMERLE



A frame from Jonathan Keith Idema's "VideoX" tapes, which he sold to news outlets as an Al Qaeda training-camp film. Questions are emerging about the tapes' authenticity.



#### An American Vigilante In Afghanistan, Using the Press for Profit and Glory

## TIN SOLDIER

BY MARIAH BLAKE

n April 2004, a former U.S. Special Forces soldier named Jonathan Keith Idema started shopping a sizzling story to the media. He claimed terrorists in Afghanistan planned to use bomb-laden taxicabs to kill key U.S. and Afghan officials, and that he himself intended to thwart the attack. Shortly thereafter, he headed to Afghanistan, where he spent the next two months conducting a series of raids with his team, which he called Task Force Saber 7. By late June, he claimed to have captured the plotters, and started trying to clinch a deal with television networks by offering them "direct access" to one of the terrorists who, he said, had agreed to tell all.

Idema, who was paying an Emmy Award-winning cameraman to document his activities, even distributed a sample tape of himself arresting people and interrogating hooded suspects. In one scene he is shown blocking a road and emptying passing vehicles. "Put your fucking hands up or I'll blow your fucking brains out," he screams at a group of men who have shuffled bewilderedly off a bus and are standing with their flimsy tunics whipping in the wind.

In exchange for footage and access, Idema wanted a minimum of \$250,000 and prominent play. He asked that ABC send Peter Jennings or Cristopher Cuomo to cover the story. Ultimately ABC turned the story down, as did CNN. A CBS spokesperson, Kelli Edwards, says the network "never seriously considered" it, although Idema was regularly e-mailing Dan Rather's office and in June the network sent two employees to Idema's Kabul headquarters to pick up the sample tape.

It appears that Idema still hadn't sold the taxicab story by July 5, when his situation took a turn for the worse. The Afghan police raided his headquarters and discovered eight prisoners, some of them tethered to chairs in a back room, which was littered with bloody cloth. The men later told reporters that they had been starved, beaten, doused with scalding water, and forced to languish for days in their own feces. Afghan authorities determined that none of the detainees had links to terrorism and set them free. Idema, on the other hand, was arrested, along with two other Americans (the cameraman and a former soldier) and four Afghans, and charged with running an unauthorized prison and torturing its inmates. After a cursory trial, he was sentenced to serve ten years. (This case is on appeal.)

For all its outlandish twists, the saga of the taxicab plot was not extraordinary for Idema, who over the years had fed the press a variety of sensational material that seemed to shed light on the shadowy world of secret soldiers, spies, and assassins. This time the story never ran, but Idema has been a key source for numerous questionable stories that did. A self-proclaimed terror-fighter who has served time for fraud, Idema took a willing media by storm, glorifying his own exploits, padding his bank account, and providing dubious information to the American public.

In January 2002, Idema sold CBS sensational footage, which he called the "VideoX" tapes, that purported to show an Al Qaeda training camp in action. The tapes became the centerpiece of the bombshell 60 Minutes II piece, "Heart of Darkness," reported by Dan Rather and touted as "the most intimate look yet at how the world's deadliest terrorist organization trains its recruits." Idema also sold video stills to a

number of print outlets, including *The Boston Globe*. MSNBC, ABC, NBC, the BBC, and others later replayed the tapes. Questions are now emerging about their authenticity, some of which were detailed in a piece by Stacy Sullivan in *New York* magazine in October.

Idema also served as an expert military commentator on Fox News and was a lead character in Robin Ed Artis, chairman and founder of the humanitarian organization Knightsbridge International, who met Idema in Afghanistan in late 2001 and later tried to warn the government and media organizations that Idema was misrepresenting himself. "They ran story after story that furthered the cachet of a self-serving, self-aggrandizing criminal."













MEET THE PRESS: Idema was a "one-man army" on MSNBC's Nachman and a terrorist hunter on Imus (previous page). On Fox News (left two frames) he was a "Northern Alliance Adviser," and on 60 Minutes II, a key source for Mary Mapes and Dan Rather.

Moore's best-selling book The Hunt for Bin Laden, which was supposed to chronicle the exploits of U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan. And he fielded hundreds of interviews with major newspapers, television networks, and radio stations, which seemed to take his swaggering claims — that he was an active-duty Green Beret in Afghanistan, an undercover spy, an explosives expert, and a key player in the hunt for Osama bin Laden — at face value. Idema used the platform the media provided to spread dubious information, much of it with crucial implications for national security and foreign policy. For example, he claimed to have uncovered a plot to assassinate Bill Clinton; that bin Laden was dead, and that the Taliban was poisoning the food that the United States was air-dropping to feed hungry Afghans. (In fact, people were getting sick from eating the desiccant packed with the food.)

Idema's career as a media personality reached its peak during the final breathless weeks of the run-up to the war in Iraq. Much of the information he provided during that period echoed the Bush administration's hotly contested rationale for war. He told MSNBC that the link between Iraq and Al Qaeda was "common knowledge" on the ground in Afghanistan, and claimed in an interview with WNYC radio's Leonard Lopate that "Iraq has been involved in supporting Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations with money, with equipment, with technology, with weapons of mass destruction." He told other wide-eyed journalists that there was ample evidence linking "Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to Al Qaeda and to the attacks on September 11," and professed to have firsthand knowledge of nuclear weapons being smuggled from Russia to all three members of the "axis of evil" - Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Few in the media questioned Idema's claims, much to the alarm of some who knew him.

"The media saw this outfitted, gregarious, apparently knowing guy, and they didn't check him out," says

dema's U.S. office is tucked inside a hulking brick warehouse in Fayetteville, North Carolina home to Fort Bragg, America's largest military base and command center for the U.S.Army Special Operations. There's little to distinguish the building from its industrial surroundings except the dark-tinted windows, and the red "Restricted Access" plaque that clings to the front door. Inside, the cavernous space is cluttered with evidence of Idema's Afghan mission: crumpled boxes of medical supplies, a lime-green presentation board bearing an organizational chart for Al Qaeda, a massive topographical map of Afghanistan. Movie posters of scowling, leather-clad action heroes plaster the surrounding walls, including a particularly large one from Men in Black over Idema's desk. It shows two movie stars clutching super-sized guns and reads, "Protecting the Earth from the Scum of the Universe."

The décor reflects Idema's decades-long quest to fashion himself an action hero. He joined the Army in 1975 and qualified for the Special Forces, but his performance was often lacking. In an evaluation report dated July 7, 1977, Captain John D. Carlson described him as "without a doubt the most unmotivated, unprofessional, immature enlisted man that I have ever known." In 1978 he transferred to a reserve unit where he served until 1981, when he was relieved of his duties, in part for his "irrationality" and "tendency toward violence." His military records indicate that he never saw combat.

After leaving active-duty service, Idema ran a series of businesses related to special operations — including a counterterrorism training school and a traveling special-operations exposition — in partnership with another former Green Beret, Thomas Bumback. During this period, which spanned the 1980s and early '90s, he claims to have been involved in a series of 'black ops," or secret military missions.

He was also compiling a long arrest record on charges including bad checks, assault, possession of stolen property, and discharging a firearm into a dwelling. Then, in 1994, Idema was tried and convicted of defrauding fifty-eight companies of about \$260,000, according to *The Fayetteville Observer*. He served three years in prison. It was while awaiting sentencing that Idema launched his first media offensive, trying to sell a story about nuclear material being smuggled out

for Fox News, which paid him \$500 per appearance, and charging journalists \$1,000 a head for tours to Tora Bora, the sprawling cave complex where U.S. forces were battling Al Qaeda troops. According to reporters, the trips included press conferences with Idema himself. Some of Idema's media schemes showed extraordinary enterprise. In one case, he reportedly lured a











PUSHING THE STORY: Idema was a hero in Robin Moore's book, which he helped write. From left: with Mike Barnicle on Nachman, as an Iraq expert on Scarborough Country, with Don Imus, Today's Katie Couric, and Dan Abrams of The Abrams Report.

of Russia. Gary Scurka, an investigative journalist and recipient of numerous prestigious awards, eventually produced a *60 Minutes* piece based, at least in part, on information Idema had provided.

Over the next decade, Idema continued to court the media with help from a faithful cadre of friends — among them Scurka, the best-selling author Robin Moore, and Edward Caraballo, the cameraman who would later be imprisoned with Idema in Afghanistan. He met with little success, though, until September 11, 2001, when a shell-shocked public, desperate to make sense of the senseless, began groping for information. Idema gladly obliged.

On September 12, 2001, Idema appeared on KTTV, Los Angeles's Fox affiliate, which billed him as a "counterterrorism adviser." He told audiences that three Canadian jetliners might have been hijacked, along with the four U.S. planes. By late October, Idema was in Afghanistan, telling associates that he planned to help two humanitarian groups — Partners International Foundation and Knightsbridge International — distribute food to hungry Afghans, and he brought along a National Geographic film crew, headed by Scurka, to make a film about his efforts. (Both aid groups say he misrepresented his plans in order to get them to cooperate.)

Idema, a stocky man who even in the Afghan hinterlands kept his salt-and-pepper hair died black, quickly adopted a quasi-military look — dark sunglasses, dust-colored fatigues, a black-and-white kaffiyeh draped around his neck. The style reflected his expanding repertoire of roles. Along with the human rights work and the documentary making, he claimed he was offering military advice to the Northern Alliance, which was fighting the Taliban. Meanwhile, he sold a variety of services to reporters, telling them he was Donald Rumsfeld's special representative to the Northern Alliance, or insinuating that he was working for the CIA or the Army Special Forces.

By December, Idema was serving as a commentator

local warlord named Hazrat Ali to the Spin Ghar Hotel in Jalalabad for a press briefing and charged reporters \$100 each to attend. It later emerged that he had told Ali that the journalists were Pentagon officials.

It's not difficult to understand why Idema — a self-proclaimed government operative with a silver tongue, striking looks, and a love of the spotlight — would appeal to reporters who, in late 2001, poured into war-ravaged Afghanistan desperate for stories. The war was being fought largely by Special Forces soldiers, who call themselves "quiet professionals" and assiduously avoid the press. Lack of information bred a sense of urgency. "The media were in a frenzy," explains Artis of Knightsbridge International. "They were interviewing each other about what they'd interview someone about if they had someone to interview." Idema also seems to have capitalized on the U.S. military's increasing reliance on contractors, and the confusion over who had authority to speak on the government's behalf.

In addition to courting reporters, Idema sometimes threatened them. Tod Robberson of *The Dallas Morning News* reported that Idema shot at him "point-blank" during an argument. And some journalists were put off by his violent tendencies and overblown swagger. A group of photographers referred to Idema, who adopted the nickname "Jack" in Afghanistan, as Jack Shit.

fter only two months in Afghanistan, Idema claimed to have found what would become the lynchpin of his widening media offensive: seven hours of footage that purportedly shows Al Qaeda training camps in action. Before long, Idema had sold video stills to several publications and enlisted the William Morris Agency to auction off the first-time U.S. broadcast rights. "The intent is to sell the tapes to the highest bidder at terms that are ultimately satisfactory to Mr. Idema," explained a letter signed by Wayne S. Kabak, chief operating officer of William

Morris, and hand-delivered to Fox News's New York offices on January 9 — one day before the auction was slated to take place. The terms included giving Idema "on-air credit as the person who procured these tapes" and the right to refuse any bid under \$150,000.

These conditions, along with Idema's dark past, gave some networks pause. *NBC Nightly News* was put off by the hefty price tag and the lack of signs of authenticity, such as a logo from As-Sahab, Al Qaeda's video production house, which appears on the tapes Al Qaeda releases to the public. "There was no way to verify them," says Robert Windrem, investigative producer for *NBC Nightly News*. "It was either you trust Keith Idema or you don't."

# He told wide-eyed journalists that there was ample evidence linking Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to Al Qaeda and September 11

CNN backed off precisely because it decided Idema could not be trusted. This was after the network's national security analyst, Ken Robinson, searched Google and LexisNexis and discovered that Idema not only had a criminal record, but also liked to batter his rivals with lawsuits. In addition to turning down the tapes, the network decided to shun Idema as a source. It was 'the only network to do so.

On January 17, CBS's 60 Minutes II ran a story about the tapes. Dan Rather traveled to Afghanistan to interview Idema and visit the dusty, bullet-scarred compound called Mir Bacha Kot, where the filming had been done. At a time when workers were still sifting through the gnarled wreckage of the World Trade Center, the story reinforced the prevailing sense of panic. Men in camouflaged tunics and ski masks were shown storming buildings, staging drive-by shootings, and laying siege to golf courses. Sometimes the men laughed as they rehearsed maneuvers, which Rather interpreted as evidence that they approached their grim mission with "glee." The footage also contained numerous exchanges in English, "a sign," Rather told viewers, "that they want to take scenes like this to the West."

ABC, MSNBC, NBC, and the BBC subsequently paid thousands of dollars to air the training-camp footage, according to Idema's bank records. These records, interviews with Idema's associates and Idema's own emails, suggest that money from media activities, including the tapes, helped fund his 2004 operations in Afghanistan.

Along the way, Idema gave varying accounts of how he got the tapes. He told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Eric Campbell that he bought them from one of his intelligence assets after a series of "back-alley meetings at midnight." In contrast, he told NBC's *Today* show that he and a group of Northern Alliance fighters "took over" Mir Bacha Kot, then went to the house of the camp's commander, where they found some of the tapes. They then hunted down "soldiers" (presumably Al Qaeda recruits) to get the others.

Tracy-Paul Warrington, former deputy commander of a Special Forces counterterrorism team and a civilian intelligence analyst for the Defense Department, believes there's a good reason Idema's story changed. "In a nutshell, the videotapes are forgeries," he says. He explains that the tactics shown in the tapes (such as the way the trainees handle their weapons) were developed in the 1970s but abandoned shortly thereafter, and are not used by modern-day Al Qaeda troops. Also, Warrington points out that the tapes depict mostly raids, whereas "Al Qaeda almost exclusively uses bombs." Finally, Idema claimed in most accounts to have found the tapes around Mir Bacha Kot, an area that Warrington contends was already under coalition control and had been thoroughly searched by coalition forces. "This man who was convicted of fraud says he finds these tapes where nobody else found them," says Warrington. "That should have set some alarm bells off."

There are conflicting reports about the CIA's stance on the tapes. A retired senior special operations officer with nearly two decades of counterterrorism experience says that while he was on active duty he learned from a CIA contact that the agency had evaluated the tapes. "They did a voice analysis and a technical analysis," reports the man, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Not only were they staged, but you could single Idema's voice out directly." On the other hand, the CIA public affairs office says the agency "did not conduct voice analysis of the tape or draw any conclusion regarding its authenticity."

CBS employees received the tapes from Idema directly, and vetted them on the ground in Afghanistan at a time when the country was still in shambles and the network's Kabul bureau was operating out of a house with spotty phone service. The network's spokesperson, Kelli Edwards, says CBS nevertheless went to great lengths to ensure the tapes were authentic before airing them. This included "confirming with U.S. military officials that the camp in the video was, in fact, an Al Qaeda training camp ... showing the tapes to three former British Special Forces officers, who verified the tactics being practiced in the video were consistent with those of Al Qaeda, and to a top U.S. military official in Afghanistan who told us that, in his opinion, the video was authentic." The network says it can't reveal those officials' names because they offered their opinions on condition of anonymity.

f all the networks, CBS had the longest-standing relationship with Idema. It had used him as a source or consultant on two projects before his arrival in Afghanistan. The first was the 1995 nuclear-smuggling story, called "The Worst Nightmare," which was produced by Scurka and aired on 60 Minutes.

Scurka had initially heard that Idema, who was then awaiting sentencing on fraud charges, had a lead on a hot story about the smuggling that he had picked up while operating his traveling exposition. Idema agreed to share information with Scurka. Scurka, meanwhile, lent a sympathetic ear to Idema's story about an injustice he felt he had suffered. Idema claimed the FBI had framed him on the fraud charges because he had refused to tell the agency where he learned about the nuclear smuggling, fearing leaks could hurt his sources.

The 60 Minutes piece, and a companion story in U.S. News & World Report, won that year's Renner Award from Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. Idema never got any credit, though. This came as a blow to Scurka, who has maintained Idema was a key source and that CBS decided to cut any reference to him largely because he was imprisoned for fraud by the time the story aired. Edwards, the CBS spokesperson, suggests Idema's contributions didn't necessarily merit credit, since the final story, which took six months to investigate, was "much different than the story we initially began pursuing."

After "The Worst Nightmare" aired, Scurka and Caraballo started work on a film about Idema, called *Any Lesser Man*, "the Real story of one lone Green Beret's private war against KGB Nuclear Smuggling, Soviet Spies, Arab Terrorists, and the FBI," according to promotional materials. Despite years of effort, they were never able to scrape together enough money to complete it.

In 2000, Idema hooked up with CBS again. This time he and Scurka served as consultants to 48 Hours, then anchored by Dan Rather. They worked on an investigative story about Colonel George Marecek, a highly decorated Special Forces officer accused of murdering his wife, Viparet. But the two were eventually fired from the project. "48 Hours determined they had taken on an advocacy role for the defense," explains Edwards of CBS. Indeed, Idema and Scurka had opened a "Free Marecek" office in Wilmington, North Carolina, where the trial was taking place, and one witness alleged that Idema and another man came to his house to harass him the night before he was slated to testify. Idema also told several associates he was detained for impersonating a police officer in an effort to get into a Detroit prison and convince a convicted serial killer to confess to Viparet's murder. Despite concerns about Idema and Scurka's objectivity, in December 2000, 48 Hours ran a story on Marecek, with much of the exculpatory evidence drawn from their research.

After being sacked by 48 Hours, Idema and Scurka

launched a Web site called Point Blank Network News, or PBN, where they ran their own version of the Marecek story. The piece won a 2001 National Press Club award for online journalism. Despite the media attention, Marecek was convicted.

If the coverage of the Al Qaeda training camp tapes lent Idema credibility and renown, his old friend Robin Moore further lionized him by making him one of the lead characters of his blockbuster book, *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, published by Random House

Moore, a seventy-nine-year-old with clear blue eyes and bushy eyebrows, wears houndstooth blazers and leans on an ivory-handled cane. Like Idema, he has long straddled the divide between the media and military camps. To get access for his first best-seller, *The Green Berets*, he went through the grueling Special Forces qualification course, something no other civilian has ever done. He later covered the Vietnam War for Hearst Newspapers, and, because of his combat skills, was allowed to travel with operational detachments that were closed to other reporters. This meant he was sometimes forced to fight. On his living room wall Moore has hung a black-and-white photo of himself gripping the sagging body of a Vietnamese boy he had killed.

It was after seeing *The Green Berets*, a 1968 film based on Moore's book, that twelve-year-old Keith Idema decided he would join the Special Forces. But it wasn't until years later, when he was peddling special operations equipment, that he actually met Moore. Over time, a deep bond developed between the two men. "Robin is . . . not only my friend," Idema wrote Scurka while he was imprisoned on fraud charges. "He is my idol, almost my creator in a way."

Idema got involved in the *Hunt for Bin Laden* book project in July 2002, not long after returning to the United States. Moore said he asked Idema to help with the book because at the time he was one of the few people in the United States with up-to-date knowledge about the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. Idema, he says, was only supposed to help ensure the book's accuracy. But he soon started adding information.

According to Moore, Idema wrote only select sections of the book. Marianne Strong, the agent who represented Moore on *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, tells a different story. "Jack wrote the book," she says. "Robin Moore started the book, but Robin Moore couldn't write the book, for a number of reasons" — among them a case of Parkinson's disease so advanced that he has difficulty signing his name. Idema, in fact, gets a credit line on the cover of the British version, and has filed a claim with the Library of Congress for sole copyright on it and on the American version. He also receives a portion of the royalties. A review of a manuscript draft of *The Hunt for Bin Laden* provided by Moore and dated June 1, 2002, just before Idema re-

turned from his first trip to Afghanistan, suggests that the truth lies somewhere in between Strong's and Moore's accounts. Idema doesn't appear to have written the whole book, but the manuscript did change dramatically after he got involved.

The Hunt for Bin Laden was published on March 3, 2003, and within weeks it was number four on The New York Times bestseller list. To date, it has sold nearly 150,000 copies. The book portrays Idema, by turns, as a superhuman warrior, undercover spy, and rough-and-tumble cultural ambassador. He rescues injured children, removes bullets from "dozens" of Northern Alliance soldiers, and embarks on intelligence-gathering

## ... 'without a doubt the most unmotivated, unprofessional, immature enlisted man that I have ever known'

an evaluation report on Idema by Captain
 John D. Carlson, dated July 7, 1977

missions that the CIA shuns because they're too dangerous. Armed with a Russian assault rifle, he holds a band of hostage takers off for hours. He also uncovers a plot to assassinate former President Bill Clinton, nearly nabs Osama bin Laden, and captures a trove of documents detailing the Qaeda leader's "terrorist plans."

Some of the heroic scenes don't match eyewitness accounts. This includes a detailed description of Idema rescuing his longtime friend Gary Scurka, who was hit by shrapnel in a Taliban artillery attack. The book describes Idema taking command of the chaotic situation, fixing the sloppy bandage applied by journalists Tim Friend and Kevin Sites, and whisking Scurka to safety. Others who were present - including Friend and a former Special Forces soldier, Greg Long - describe a different scene. They say Sites, Friend, and Long applied a proper dressing. Friend, in fact, had worked as a surgical technician for six years. But when Idema arrived he ripped off the bandages and put on new ones, as the National Geographic cameraman recorded his every move. "It was only in retrospect that I realized he was acting for the camera," Friend says.

Moore had collaborated with Idema on several projects before *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, and even secured an agent for a book, *Any Lesser Man*, about Idema's life. He also contributed \$2,500 to the film project of the same name. During that period, Moore, highly respected by Green Berets, started getting warning emails from members of the Special Forces community. "Mr. Idema is not near the man/hero that he is being made out to be," wrote retired Captain William J. Adams

in August 1999. "Lots of information provided by him doesn't wash according to eyewitness accounts and his demonstrated performance on active duty."

In the media push that followed the release of *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, Idema became its spokesman. This period, which marked the crescendo of his career as a media personality, came during the run-up to the Iraq war, and in the dozens of interviews Idema fielded, he often doubled as an expert on the looming conflict.

Many of Idema's claims, such as the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection, have since been discredited by the 9-11 Commission and UN weapons inspectors, but by billing him as a government official, the media lent them credence. NPR called him a "U.S. intelligence operative," while Northeast Public Radio dubbed him "the longest-serving Green Beret in the Afghanistan war." Others implied that Idema was working in an official capacity by saying he played an "integral" role in the hunt for Osama bin Laden and that he fought "alongside" U.S. Special Forces, or by calling him as a "former Green Beret who served in Afghanistan."

As Idema was blazing a trail through the talk show circuit, Ed Artis, who felt that Idema's actions in Afghanistan had put his employees in danger, went on a fax and e-mail blitz to alert the media that there were questions about Idema's credibility. (Idema has since filed suit against Artis.) Several shows canceled interviews after receiving the warning, something Strong, the book's agent, resents. "The Hunt would have made it to number one if it weren't for that," she says.

Around the same time, Wayne Lawley, then the president of the Special Forces Association, a fraternal organization for past and present Green Berets, sent an e-mail to association members about the book saying: "The knowledgeable reader may be irritated by fiction used to fill in research and outrageous claims by Keith Adema [sic], one of the book's advisors." The message was far more measured than some of the replies it prompted. Idema "is doing all he can to besmirch the name of Special Forces, and all we stand for," wrote Billy Waugh, a former Green Beret and CIA operative, who has detailed his own experience in a 2004 book called Hunting the Jackal. "This man has lied to the nth degree, and all for self-aggrandizement." Gradually, Moore came to see Idema in a similar light. "He wants to be the hero of every story," Moore says. "He tries to portray himself as a hero, even if he has to lie.'

A series of events caused the shift in Moore's opinion. A "Hunt for Bin Laden" Web site registered to Idema began advertising an upcoming Robin Moore book about Idema entitled *An Army of One*. Moore said the site was unauthorized and that he never planned to write such a book. Idema also charged about \$10,000 worth of books to Moore's account at Random House. Moore says Idema did this without his permission and that Idema also slipped the names and post office boxes of two groups into a list of charities

that appear in the back of the British version of the book (because a percentage of the royalties were to be directed to these groups). One of the addresses was for U.S. Counter-Terrorist Group (Counterr), the umbrella organization for Idema's own Afghanistan operations. (At least one reader sent a donation to Counterr, according to Idema's bank records.) The other address was supposed to be for a charity that helped the families of killed or wounded Green Berets, but North Carolina's postal inspector determined that the post office box was actually controlled by Idema, and was investigating him for mail fraud before his Afghan arrest.

Moore eventually submitted a host of corrections that he wanted made to The Hunt for Bin Laden. based largely on input from Special Forces contacts, but many were never incorporated. Carol Schneider, Random House's spokesperson, said the publisher made all changes that it received in time, but a number of them came after the deadline had passed. Then, in late October, Robin Moore gave Random House a proposal for a scathing second book on Idema, Smoke and Mirrors: Jonathan Keith Idema and bis Great Media Swindle, but Random House turned it down. "I'm not going to do this," Bob Loomis, vice president and executive editor for the publisher, said to Moore, as CJR's reporter sat listening over a speakerphone in Moore's living room. "It's too negative on Jack. It reflects badly on The Hunt because of his role in it."

dema headed back to Afghanistan in mid-April 2004, accompanied by Caraballo, who would claim after their arrest that he was a journalist working on an independent documentary. But according to bank records, Idema was paying him.

Idema's lawyer, John Edwards Tiffany, says that by the end of April Idema had arrested his first prisoner, whom he turned over to U.S. officials on May 3. But two months later the man was released after the United States Central Command determined that he was not the high-ranking Taliban official Idema had claimed he was. The command began to investigate Idema, and shortly thereafter Wanted posters for Idema went up in Kabul. He and his cohorts nevertheless made a series of arrests in June, according to Tiffany. It wasn't until July 5 that Afghan police finally nabbed him, along with Caraballo, the former U.S. soldier Brent Bennett, and four Afghans who were working with them. At the time, the Abu Ghraib scandal was raging. Idema claimed he was working with the knowledge and approval of the U.S. government (something the Central Command and the State Department adamantly deny) and presented some evidence to support this claim during his trial. But none of it seems to point to definitive links to the Afghan or U.S. governments. Among the material is a video of meetings between Idema and two Afghan ministers. But both reportedly said they met with Idema to discuss his claims about the taxi-bomb plot only because they believed he was a member of the U.S. military. Tiffany also played tape-recorded conversations of Idema purportedly talking to officials in Deputy Undersecretary of Defense William G. Boykin's office. In one of the conversations, recorded after the Wanted posters for him went up, Idema threatens to give some unidentified material to the press, "Someone's got to do something within twelve hours or I'm going to e-mail this fucking thing to Dan Rather," he warns. "Do you think I would rot in prison if there's a problem?"

Most of the evidence, though, is one-directional communication, with Idema offering information or asking for assistance. There may be a reason for this: According to Bumback, and Idema's own e-mails, Idema had been trying desperately to secure a Pentagon contract, but hadn't been able to do so. Bumback says that's why Idema largely relied on the media to fund his operations. "Somebody had to replenish the till," he says. "Uncle Sam wasn't doing it."

Despite his problems, including a December shootout in his cell block, Idema continues to hatch ever-more creative schemes to ensure that history portrays him as a swashbuckling hero. From his jail cell he is telling associates that he plans lawsuits against Tod Robberson of The Dallas Morning News and the freelance journalist Stacy Sullivan, two reporters who have written investigative pieces about him since his arrest in Afghanistan. Idema made it clear in a recent letter to one of his attorneys (who was instructed in the letter to distribute it to other members of Idema's inner circle) that his goal was to influence future coverage. "Whatever we sue them for doesn't matter," he wrote. "It puts all the others on notice that 1) we will and can sue; 2) I still have fangs, and lawyers, even from an Afghan prison cell; 3) other people better check their stories ...." Idema is also apparently trying to sway coverage by making reporters sign detailed contracts in order to get an interview with him. Tiffany, Idema's attorney, says at least one journalist has already done so. Idema wouldn't speak with CJR because the magazine refused to sign such an agreement.

Meanwhile, Idema is negotiating with an agent regarding a film about his exploits. And Strong, Moore's former agent, recently received a 12,000-word installment of Idema's book, which she said she has already discussed with dozens of publishers. Its working title: *Army of One*.

Perhaps these developments explain the optimism pouring out of Idema's Afghan prison cell. "When Caesar crossed into Italy with his legion . . . he said, 'let the dice fly high,' "he wrote in a recent letter." Well, we did, and although we are down, I know I will prevail in the end."

Mariah Blake is an assistant editor at CIR. Additional reporting on this story was provided by A. G. Basoli in Afghanistan. CIR gratefully acknowledges support for this article from the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

## Yes, CBS screwed up badly in 'Memogate' — but so did those who covered the affair

## **BLOG-GATE**

01 August 1972

#### MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Bush, George W. lst Lt.3244754FG Suspension of Flight status

- 1. On this date I ordered that 1st Lt. Bush be suspended from flight status due to failure to perform to USAF/TexANG standards/and failure to meet annual physical examination (flight) as ordered.
- 2. I conveyed my verbal orders to commander, 147th Ft. Introp Gp with request for orders for suspension and convening of a flight review board IAW AFM 35-13.
- 3. I recommended transfer of this officer to the 9921 st Air Reserve Squadron in May and forwarded his AF Form 1288 to 147 th Ftr Introp Gp headquarters. The transfer was not allowed. Officer has made no attempt to meet his training certification or flight physical. Officer expresses desire to transfer out of state including assignment to non-flying billets.
- 4. On recommendation of Harris, I also suggested that we fill this critical billet with a more seasoned pilot from the list of qualified Vietnam pilots that have rotated. Recommendations were received but not confirmed.

JERRY B. KILLIA.
Lt. Colonel

#### BY COREY PEIN

"The drama began when CBS posted forged National Guard documents on its Web site and, that same evening, an attentive 'Freeper' (a regular at the conservative FreeRepublic.com Internet site) named Buckhead raised suspicion of fraud. From there, intrepid bloggers Powerlineblog.com and Little Green Footballs, the Woodward and Bernstein of Rathergate, began to document the mounting signs of forgery."

— Chris Weinkopf in The American Enterprise Online

"The yeomen of the blogosphere and AM radio and the Internet took [CBS's 60 Minutes II] down. It was to me a great historical development in the history of politics in America. It was Agincourt."

- Peggy Noonan in The Wall Street Journal

"NOTE to old media scum .... We are just getting warmed up!"

- "Rrrod," on FreeRepublic.com

loggers have claimed the attack on CBS News as their Boston Tea Party, a triumph of the democratic rabble over the lazy elites of the MSM (that's mainstream media to you). But on close examination the scene looks less like a victory for democracy than a case of mob rule. On September 8, just weeks before the presidential election, 60 Minutes II ran a story about how George W. Bush got preferential treatment as he glided through his time in the Texas Air National Guard The story was anchored on four memos that, it turns out, were of unknown origin. By the time you read this, the independent commission hired by the network to examine the affair may have released its report, and heads may be rolling. Dan Rather and company stand accused of undue haste, carelessness, excessive credulity, and, in some minds, partisanship, in what has become known as "Memogate."

But CBS's critics are guilty of many of the very same sins. First, much of the bloggers' vaunted fact-checking was seriously warped. Their driving assumptions were often drawn from flawed information or based on faulty logic. Personal attacks passed for analysis. Second, and worse, the reviled MSM often followed the bloggers' lead. As mainstream media critics of CBS piled on, rumors shaped the news and conventions of sourcing and skepticism fell by the wayside. Dan Rather is not alone on this one; respected journalists made mistakes all around.

Consider the memos in question. They were supposed to have been written by Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Killian, now dead, who supervised Bush in the Guard. We know Killian's name was on them. We don't know whether the memos were forged, authentic, or some combination thereof. Indeed, they could be fake but accurate, as Killian's secretary, Marian Carr Knox, told CBS on September 15. We don't know through what process they wound up in the possession of a former Guardsman, Bill Burkett, who gave them to the star CBS producer Mary Mapes. Who really wrote them? Theories abound: The Kerry campaign created the documents. CBS's source forged them. Karl Rove planted them. They were real. Some of them were real. They were recreations of real documents. The bottom line, which credible document examiners concede, is that copies cannot be authenticated either way with absolute certainty. The memos that were circulated online were digitized, scanned, faxed, and copied who knows how many times from an unknown original source. We know less about this story than we think we do, and less than we printed, broadcast, and posted.

Ultimately, we don't know enough to justify the conventional wisdom: that the documents were "apparently bogus" (as Howard Kurtz put it, reporting on Dan Rather's resignation) and that a major news network was an accomplice to political slander.

What efforts did CBS make to track down the original source? What warnings did CBS's own experts provide to 60 Minutes II before air time? These are matters for the independent commission, headed by Lou Boccardi, former chief of The Associated Press, and Dick Thornburgh, the former U.S. attorney general. But meanwhile, the dangerous impatience in the way the rest of the press handled this journalistic tale bears examination, too.

#### 'IT ISN'T JUST RUSH LIMBAUGH . . .'

Three types of evidence were used to debate the documents' authenticity after Rather and 60 Minutes II used them in the story. The first, typography, took many detours before winding up at inconclusive. The second, military terminology, is more telling but also not final. The third, the recollections of those involved, is most promising, but so far woefully underreported.

Haste explains the rapid spread of thinly supported theories and flawed critiques, which moved from partisan blogs to the nation's television sets. For example, the morning after CBS's September 8 report, the conservative blog Little Green Footballs posted a do-it-vourself experiment that supposedly proved that the documents were produced on a computer. On September 11, a self-proclaimed typography expert, Joseph Newcomer, copied the experiment, and posted the results on his personal Web site. Little Green Footballs delighted in the "authoritative and definitive" validation, and posted a link to Newcomer's report on September 12. Two days later, Newcomer - who was "100 percent" certain that the memos were forged — figured high in a Washington Post report. The Post's mention of Newcomer came up that night on Fox, MSNBC, and CNN, and on September 15, he was a guest on Fox News's Hannity & Colmes.

Newcomer gave the press what it wanted: a definite answer. The problem is, his proof turns out to be far less than that. Newcomer's résumé — boasting a Ph.D. in computer science and a role in creating electronic type-setting — seemed impressive. His conclusions came out quickly, and were bold bordering on hyperbolic. The accompanying analysis was long and technical, discouraging close examination. Still, his method was simple to replicate, and the results were easy to understand:

Based on the fact that I was able, in less than five minutes ... to type in the text of the 01-August-1972 memo into Microsoft Word and get a document so close that you can hold my document in front of the 'authentic' document and see virtually no errors, I can assert without any doubt (as have many others) that this document is a modern forgery. Any other position is indefensible.

Red flags wave here, or should have. Newcomer be-

gins with the presumption that the documents are forgeries, and as evidence submits that he can create a very similar document on his computer. This proves nothing — you could make a replica of almost any document using Word. Yet Newcomer's aggressive conclusion is based on this logical error.

Many of the typographic critiques were similarly flawed. Would-be gumshoes typed up documents on their computers and fooled around with the images in Photoshop until their creation matched the originals. Someone remembered something his ex-military uncle told him, others recalled the quirks of an IBM typewriter not seen for twenty years. There was little new evidence and lots of pure speculation. But the speculation framed the story for the working press.

# The men formed a feedback loop, promoting a version of events in which Bush's service is unquestionable, even exemplary.

The very first post attacking the memos — nineteen minutes into the 60 Minutes II program — was on the right-wing Web site FreeRepublic.com by an active Air Force officer, Paul Boley of Montgomery, Alabama, who went by the handle "TankerKC." Nearly four hours later it was followed by postings from "Buckhead," whom the Los Angeles Times later identified as Harry Mac-Dougald, a Republican lawyer in Atlanta. (MacDougald refused to tell the Times how he was able to mount a case against the documents so quickly.) Other blogs quickly picked up the charges. One of the story's top blogs, Rathergate.com, is registered to a firm run by Richard Viguerie, the legendary conservative fund-raiser. Some were fed by the conservative Media Research Center and by Creative Response Concepts, the same p.r. firm that promoted the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. CRC's executives bragged to PR Week that they helped legitimize the documents-are-fake story by supplying quotes from document experts as early as the day after the report, September 9. The goal, said president Greg Mueller, was to create a buzz online while at the same time showing journalists "it isn't just Rush Limbaugh and Matt Drudge who are raising questions."

In order to understand "Memogate," you need to understand "Haileygate." David Hailey, a Ph.D. who teaches tech writing at Utah State University — not a professional document examiner, but a former Army illustrator — studied the CBS memos. His typographic analysis found that, contrary to widespread assump-

tions, the document may have been typed. (He points out, meanwhile, that because the documents are typed does not necessarily mean they are genuine.) Someone found a draft of his work on a publicly accessible university Web site, and it wound up on a conservative blog, Wizbang. The blog, citing "evidence" that it had misinterpreted, called Hailey a "liar, fraud, and charlatan." Soon Hailey's e-mail box was flooded. Anonymous callers demanded his dismissal.

Hailey is more restrained in his comments than other document examiners more widely quoted in the press. Of course, cautious voices tend to be quieter than confident ones.

Hailey wasn't the only one to feel the business end of a blog-mob. The head of one CBS affiliate said he received 5,000 e-mail complaints after the *60 Minutes II* story, only 300 of which were from his viewing area.

The specific points of contention about the memos are too numerous to go into here. One, the raised "th" character appearing in the documents, became emblematic of the scandal, as Internet analysts contended that typewriters at the time of the memo could not produce that character. But they could, in fact, according to multiple sources. Some of the CBS critics contend they couldn't produce the specific "th" seen in the CBS documents. But none other than Bobby Hodges, who was Colonel Killian's Guard supervisor, thinks otherwise. He told CJR, "The typewriter can do that little 'th,' sure it can." He added, "I didn't think they were forged because of the typewriter, spacing, or signature. The only reason is because of the verbiage."

Hodges's doubts about the memo rest mainly on military terminology, and he has a list of twenty-one things wrong with the terms used in the CBS documents. He says he came up with the first ten in a couple of minutes. For example, he points to the use of "OETR" instead of "OER" (for Officer Effectiveness Report), and the use of the word "billets" instead of "positions." This helped close the case for some, but probably shouldn't have. Even preliminary digging casts some doubt on the evidence. For example, Bill Burkett was quoted in a book published last March using the term "OER," suggesting he would've known better had he forged the documents as Hodges and others implied in interviews. And newspaper stories and Air Guard documents indicate that the term "billets" was indeed used in the Air Guard, at least in the mid-1980s. Such small points don't prove anything about the memos. But they do suggest that the press should never accept as gospel the first explanation that comes along.

#### THE DOUBLE STANDARD

As Memogate progressed, certain talking points became conventional wisdom. Among them, that CBS's producer, Mary Mapes, was a liberal stooge; that her source, Bill Burkett, was a lefty moonbat with an ax to grind. Both surely wanted to nail a story that Bush got preferential treatment in the National Guard. Still, there was a double standard at work. Liberals and their fellow travelers were outed like witches in Salem, while Bush's defenders forged ahead, their affinities and possible motives largely unexamined.

The Killian memos seem to have grown out of battles that began long before last September. In early 2004, Burkett had featured prominently in a book, *Bush's War for Reelection*, by the Texas journalist Jim Moore, who also co-wrote the Karl Rove biography *Bush's Brain. Bush's War for Reelection* included a story dating back to 1997, when Burkett worked as an adviser to the head of the Texas National Guard at Camp Mabry. In that role, Burkett says, he witnessed a plan to scrub George W. Bush's file of embarrassments.

When this came out, the press naturally turned to the people Burkett had named in Moore's book. And those men — Danny James, Joe Allbaugh, John Scribner, and George Conn — all dismissed Burkett's story. That's four against one, but not necessarily case closed. Most reporters omitted some basic, and relevant, biographic facts about Burkett's critics.

For example, Joe Allbaugh was usually identified in press accounts - in The New York Times, the Baltimore Sun, and USA Today, to name a few as Bush's old chief of staff. He is much more. In 1999 Allbaugh, the self-described "heavy" of the Bush campaign. told The Washington Post, "There isn't anything more important than protecting [Bush] and the first lady." He was made head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency after Bush's victory, resigned in 2003, and went on to head New Bridge Strategies, a firm that helps corporations land contracts in Iraq.

Danny James, a Vietnam veteran and the son of "Chappie" James, America's first black four-star general, is also a political appointee whose fortunes rose with Bush's. He had his own reason to dislike Burkett. Burkett's 2002 lawsuit in a Texas district court against the Guard claimed that the staff of then adjutant-general James retaliated

against him for refusing to falsify reports. It was dismissed, like other complaints against James and the Guard, not on the merits, but because under Texas law the courts considered such complaints internal military matters. Without further investigation, we are stuck at he said, she said.

Many of the people defending Bush in February on the scrubbing story appeared again in September, when the alleged Killian documents appeared on CBS. Other defenders appeared as well, and rarely were their connections to the Bush camp made clear, or the basis for their claims probed.

Other pieces of context might have been helpful, too. For example, Maurice Udell, the former commander of the 147th Fighter Interceptor Group, in which Bush served, first came to Bush's defense in 2000 and was resurrected for the same cause in 2004. After Memogate he was a guest on Hannity & Colmes and was quoted in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, saving the memos were "so totally false they were ridiculous." He also popped up in The Richmond Times-Distratch and an Associated Press story. No one noted the cloudy circumstances of Udell's exit from the military (probably because the relevant clips are hard to find in electronic databases). In 1985, after an Air Force investigation into contract fraud. as well as misuse of base resources, Udell was ordered to resign. The initial probe included an allegation of illegal arms shipment to Honduras, but the charge came up dry.

Context was also lacking in quotes from Bush's old National Guard roommate. Dean Roome, who appeared with this old boss Udell on Hannity & Colmes. With one exception, Roome's press appearances have served a singular purpose: praise the president, attack the memos. The exception was notable and often reprinted. Last February. USA Today used a quote from a 2002 interview with Roome: "Where George failed was to fulfill his obligation as a pilot. It was an irrational time in his life." Roome says the comment was taken out of context, and emphasizes how great it was to fly with Bush.

In his office, Roome had taped up a

## Think Global:



#### Get your master's in journalism in Asia

One of the world's premier master's in journalism programs is in the heart of Asia at English-language University of Hong Kong.

Our international faculty comes from Asia's and the world's leading newsrooms, including the New York Times.

You'll meet the region's newsmakers and hear top journalists from AP, CNN, the Asian Wall Street Journal and elsewhere discuss the day's issues.

Our internship program provides opportunities in China, the U.S. and throughout Asia.

> Journalism and Media Studies Centre

#### The University of Hong Kong

Forms and more at http://jmsc.hku.hk

jmscmj@hku.hk (852) 2859 1155

Go Global, Go Asia, Get Ahead In Your Career printout of a September 16 Washington Times story in which the reporter asked Roome to speculate about who "the forger" was. Roome does not name Burkett but hints that it was he, without offering specifics. Roome also has a framed picture of President Bush signed, "to my friend Dean Roome, with best wishes." Another picture shows Roome and Bush on a couch. Roome says it's from this past March, when he attended a private party in Houston with Bush and about a dozen old friends. The meeting, Roome said, was a back-slapping affair, in which Bush told the group how he cherished his old friends from the Guard, Midland, and Dallas.

When the central charge is a cover-up, as it was in the CBS story, vigilance is required. Thus, the connections between Bush's old associates should have seen print. Together the men formed a feedback loop, referring reporters to one another and promoting a version of events in which Bush's service is unquestionable, even exemplary. With such big names and old grudges in play, journalists are obliged to keep digging.

he Memogate melee peaked in late September. On cable, Joe Scarborough of MSNBC held forth with hasty overstatements: "I'm supposed to say 'allegedly forged.' I think everybody in America knows these documents were forged." His guests threw in anything that sounded good: "You know, Dan Rather's being called on the Internet, 'Queen of the Space Unicorns,' "said Bob Kohn, author of a book on why *The New York Times* "can no longer be trusted." (The "Space Unicorn" line had first appeared on Jim Treacher's conservative humor blog, and quickly wound up on *The Wall Street Journal*'s online opinion page.)

Conclusions were often hidden within questions, no matter how little evidence supported them. NBC's Ann Curry, hosting the *Today* show, asked a guest, who had no way of knowing: "Was CBS a pawn in a dirty tricks effort by the Kerry campaign to smear . . . President Bush? Can we go that far?"

No, we can't. But by the time Dan Rather announced on November 23 that he would step down from the anchor spot in March 2005, the bloggers' perceptions had taken hold. For example, the December 6 issue of *Newsweek* stated, incorrectly, that Rather had acknowledged that the *60 Minutes II* report "was based on false documents." The following week the magazine's "Clarification" was limited to what Rather had said, not to what *Newsweek* or anyone else could have known about the documents.

Dan Rather trusted his producer; his producer trusted her source. And her source? Who knows. To many, Burkett destroyed his own credibility when he told Dan

> Rather that he had lied about the source of the Killian memos. Still, many suppositions about Burkett are based on standards that were not applied evenly across the board. In November and December the first entry for "Bill Burkett" in Google, the most popular reference tool of the twentyfirst century, was on a blog called Fried Man. It classifies Burkett as a member of the "loony left," based on his Web posts. In these, Burkett says corporations will strip Iraq, obliquely compares Bush to Napoleon and "Adolf," and calls for the defense of constitutional principles. These supposedly damning rants, alluded to in USA Today, The Washington Post, and elsewhere, are not really any loonier than an essay in Harper's or a conversation at a Democratic party gathering during the campaign. While Burkett



#### Northeastern University School of Journalism



At the Northeastern University School of Journalism in Boston, we offer a one-year Master's program for mid-career journalists interested in teaching and expanding their knowledge in urban affairs, cinema studies and other fields. Graduate students work closely with our faculty, all of whom have at least ten years of professional experience in print or broadcast journalism (including the Los Angeles Times, Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report and CNN). Research track students can take courses in literary journalism, press criticism and ethics; choose a specialty area from a wide variety of graduate courses in sociology, criminal justice, political science, history and cinema studies; and write a thesis examining a major issue in the media. Qualified students may be offered an opportunity to teach basic journalism to undergraduates, which will help defray some of their tuition costs.

The deadline for Fall 2005 admission is August 1, 2005. Please contact Graduate Coordinator, at GradJourn@neu.edu. Online applications can be submitted at http://www.cas.neu.edu/grad

Northeastern University is an Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action Educational Institution and Employer, Title IX University.



http://www.neu.edu

doesn't like the president, many people in America share that opinion, and the sentiment doesn't make him a forger.

Jim Moore, who relied on Burkett for much of his book on Bush, says he initially called some of the generals who worked with Burkett to check his source's reputation — but didn't tell them what the story was about. They all said Burkett was honest and trustworthy. When Moore called them back, and described the accusations, only one of them, Danny James, then changed his opinion, calling Burkett a liar. George Conn, the ex-Guardsman who said he didn't remember Burkett's story of file-scrubbing, nevertheless told reporters Burkett was "honest and forthright."

Newsweek's Mike Isikoff has said that he interviewed Burkett last February and thought Burkett "sounded credible," but didn't use the Texan's story because he couldn't substantiate it. Good decision. CBS couldn't prove the authenticity of the documents in its story, and look at the results. Dan Rather has announced his resignation under a cloud and his aggressive news division is tarnished. And the coverage of Memogate effectively killed the story of Bush's Guard years. Those who kept asking questions found themselves counted among the journalistic fringe.

While 2004 brought many stories of greater public import than how George W. Bush spent the Vietnam War, the year brought few of greater consequence for the media than the coverage of Memogate. When the smoke cleared, mainstream journalism's authority was weakened. But it didn't have to be that way.

Corey Pein is an assistant editor at CIR.

### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

is seeking applicants for the

### MCCLOY FELLOWSHIPS

#### IN JOURNALISM

sponsored by

#### THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON GERMANY

McCloy Fellowships give American journalists the opportunity to conduct research in Germany on political, social, and economic issues. Applicants must be U.S. citizens, have a bachelor's degree and experience as a working journalist, and be able to devote three to four consecutive weeks to travel in Germany within 12 months of the award. Fellows receive a per diem of \$150 for up to 28 days; transatlantic airfare and approved domestic travel in Germany are also covered. Applicants should submit a cover letter outlining what they hope to gain professionally and personally from the experience, a project proposal of at least two pages, a resume and two letters of recommendation. Send to:

Eryn Curfman
John J. McCloy Fellowships
Graduate School of Journalism, Room 701
Columbia University
2950 Broadway, New York, NY 10027
ec2165@columbia.edu

Deadline is April 15, 2005

Questions? Please contact Jane M. Folpe, Asst. Director, Programs & Prizes, at jf680@columbia.edu

# The Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University announces

First prize award \$10,000



Awards of distinction \$1,000

## The 2005 Mongerson Prize for Investigative Reporting on the News

The Mongerson Prize honors journalists who uncover and correct incomplete, inaccurate or misleading news stories.

It is the only prize to honor the watchdogs of news coverage, and it improves press credibility by encouraging journalists to show the public they monitor media mistakes.

Entries are welcome from U.S.-based newspapers, magazines, radio, television, wire services or online news outlets that are readily available to the American public.

Submissions for the 2005 award must be produced between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2004.

Washington Post media reporter Howard Kurtz won the 2004 prize for breaking the story about New York Times reporter Jayson Blair's plagiarism.

ABC's "20/20" co-anchor John Stossel and producer Kristina Kendall won the 2003 award for examining the media's tendency to overstate problems like road rage to add an unwarranted urgency to their stories.

Baltimore Sun media reporter David Folkenflik won the 2002 prize for his investigation of Geraldo Rivera's coverage of the war in Afghanistan.

Deadline for submissions: March 1, 2005.

For more information, call 202-661-0141 or see our Web site: www.mongersonprize.org.

Medill

1325 G St. NW, Suite 730 Washington, DC 20005

#### LETTER FROM BELGRADE

The Serbian media are haunted by their past and uncertain about their future. All, that is, but Zeljko Mitrovic and trashy TV Pink.

## THE PARADOX OF PINK

#### BY JARED MANASEK

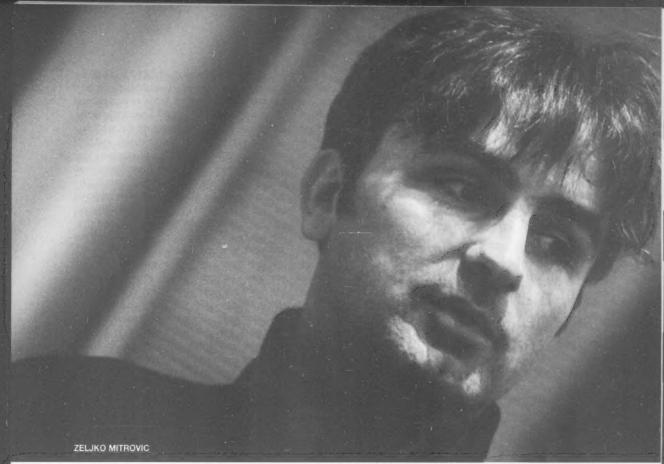
he only two places you are allowed to smoke in the Belgrade headquarters of B92 are the dining room of the canteen, and outside. The television and radio station's offices are new, and the smoking ban seems to fit with the spare design and the bustling activity of a lot of good-looking young reporters. Sasa Mirkovic, B92's general manager, says that when they moved to the new premises in December 2003, he thought the ban would be much harder on his employees than it actually was. "We had to do it, because of the air conditioning," he explained.

In a country where people who smoke are almost as common as people who wear shoes, the B92 smoking ban is a tell-tale sign of deep change at one of the country's most influential news outlets. B92 started as a student radio station in 1989, and for much of its life it operated out of a couple of rented floors in the grubby downtown skyscraper Dom Omladine, or House of Youth, a municipal building dedicated to student cultural activities. It was from there that B92 became one of the loudest voices for a democratic Serbia, making it the darling of the democracy tub-thumpers in the West and eventually playing an instrumental role in the effort to topple Slobodan Milosevic, the dictator who presided over the collapse of Yugoslavia. The Dom Omladine offices always seemed to be part of the package,

evoking a youthful revolutionary force. And judging from the ashtrays strewn about, it was a revolution that, like many before it, smoked.

In the years since a popular uprising forced Milosevic to give up the presidency of Yugoslavia in October 2000, B92 has refashioned itself as a public service broadcaster, one that would lead the country down the road to catharsis through rigorous excavation of past sins and a rational nudge toward reform and integration with Europe. In the process, the station has been forced to clean its own house, too. It is weaning itself from the stream of foreign aid that sustained it through the Milosevic years and struggling to translate its moral authority into commercial success in Serbia's new market-driven media world. These days Mirkovic and Veran Matic, B92's editor-in-chief, are less worried about getting shut down or having their reporters disappeared than they are about market share and balance sheets.

When Mirkovic described the decision to gather all of B92's operations — which now include radio,TV, online, music promotion, and book publishing — under one roof, he used words like "synergy," "cost-cutting," and "restructure." B92's new neighbors include the Serbian head office of the French bank Société Générale. And even though the new street still carries a clunky socialist name, Mirkovic assures me that a new name — Bulevar



ALEKSANDAR ANDJIC

Europa, perhaps, or something honoring Zoran Djindjic, Serbia's first democratically elected prime minister, who was assassinated in March 2003 — is on the way.

These are names from a modern, pro-Western era that has not yet, in all certainty, arrived. But it is an era that B92 helped fight for. And while its journalists are still young, hungry, and strung out on Marlboro Lights, the erstwhile student radio station has been busy becoming a media institution. It has grown up, moved out of the House of Youth, and, officially at least, quit smoking.

It is tempting to explain these changes as the direct result of the victory of the forces of democracy over Milosevic, who is now standing trial for war crimes at the international court in the Hague. And that is true, up to a point.

But the post-Milosevic era has been difficult for Serbian media in unexpected ways. The failure of reformers to quickly establish a set of laws and principles to guide the press out of its authoritarian past and into a democratic future created a frontier-like landscape, where those with the means did what they wanted without waiting for the regulators to tell them it was okay. Even before the war, TV was the country's dominant source of news and information. But in recent years, the number of television stations on the air has mushroomed to

the point where no one — not even the putative government regulators — knows how many there are.

Into this regulatory void stepped TV Pink and its thirty-eight-year-old owner, Zeljko Mitrovic. Mitrovic, who has been shrewdly building his media empire since the late 1980s, absorbed a different lesson about the role of media in a free society. It is a lesson that owes more to Rupert Murdoch than to the BBC: a steady diet of cheaply produced programming that offers manufactured drama, titillation, and sensational news will bring the viewers and make you rich. Toprated Pink's philosophy not only stands opposed to B92's public service approach, but is actually driving the evolution of the media in Serbia and forcing B92—and everyone else—to either adapt or die.

V Pink reaches over 90 percent of Serbian homes and has subsidiaries in neighboring countries. Its domestic advertising revenue accounts for about a third of Serbia's overall advertising spending, which is estimated to have reached \$85 million in 2003. The station is dedicated to high ratings, which it achieves through a mix of American movies, Serbian pop music, and scantily clad women. Its journalism is sensational and thin, particularly in comparison to B92's probing coverage. And Pink's hyper-

modern glass-and-steel headquarters, set down like an alien spaceship in the elite residential neighborhood of Dedinje, makes the sort of ostentatious statement that B92's spare new digs never could. And of course, at Pink you can smoke.

Pink's dominance has ramifications well beyond the competitive media environment. If ever there was a country in need of an honest and aggressively free press, it is Serbia. Since the end of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the world has largely turned its attention to

## A Western diplomat explained the divide: 'The orthodox son of socialist self-management is public service. The market's son is tit and shit.'

other crises, like Afghanistan and Iraq. Meanwhile Serbia has struggled to establish international legitimacy while dealing with the sharp social divides created during the Milosevic era and the economic fallout from a decade of war, corruption, and mismanagement. Sixteen thousand people remain missing from the first Bosnian war alone. The indictment of suspected Serbian war criminals is seen by some as proof of the West's anti-Serb agenda, while corruption and political insiderism have tainted many efforts to privatize state-run industries. Under Milosevic, organized crime had its hand on many of the levers of state power, and it is still assumed to be influential in politics, law, and business. These are the sorts of problems that the press could force the nation to confront. First, though, the press needs to confront its own past, and Mitrovic and TV Pink are unlikely to lead that charge.

Before his overthrow, Milosevic relied on Radio-Television Serbia, the state broadcaster, which had a monopoly on national broadcasting, was the keeper of local frequencies, and became the regime's terrifyingly effective propaganda machine. But he also permitted local opposition stations. "Milosevic tolerated free media, as long as it didn't get too powerful," says Snjezana Milivojevic, a journalism professor at the University of Belgrade and one of the leaders of a small but vocal coterie of liberal media reformers, many of whom are linked to B92. In fact, throughout the 1990s B92 was technically a "socially owned" property — the Yugoslav variant of a communist-style state firm - and it remained so until it was partially privatized in 2003. For the authorities, what mattered was that the station was preaching to a choir of Belgrade's educated urban elite but not to the population at large. Until it went onto the Internet in 1996, you couldn't hear B92 outside of Belgrade.

Milosevic played his cards with RTS masterfully, using its news to create and disseminate national myths — of the warrior-hero, of Serbs as victims, and of the new world order's conspiracy against the Serbs. "We witnessed the spectacularization of the war," says Milivojevic. "It was done largely by the media, and people here took it literally." Any private broadcaster that wanted to get big also had to be benign. They "were given the opportunity to do their commercial programming, in exchange for withdrawing from criticism of the war," says Milivojevic. TV Pink willingly obliged.

In an era of war, hyperinflation, and public sacrifice, TV Pink's mindless entertainment was a welcome distraction. Milosevic's support helped Pink rapidly expand between 1994 and 1996. The growth came with obligations, however, and by 1996, Mitrovic had cemented his ties with Serbia's political establishment by joining the Yugoslav Left/JUL party of Milosevic's wife, Mira Markovic. He served briefly in parliament on the JUL's ticket, and then left the party in September 2000, just a month before the regime collapsed.

After Milosevic's ouster, the media were a natural target for democratic reformers, who wanted to wrest control of the state broadcaster from the hands of political officials and establish laws that covered everything from cross-ownership to dealing with hate speech to the promotion of domestic production. At the same time, many journalists, media reformers, and opposition figures felt that the media had a responsibility to address their past complicity with the regime. Only after doing so, they reasoned, could they then turn to society at large and help in the healing process. "We talked about a truth and reconciliation committee," said Velimir Curgus Kazimir, a Belgrade journalist and head of the Media Documentation Center. "But we don't have a Nelson Mandela, and we will never get one. We recognized the media as a sort of tool for this." When Zoran Djindjic came to power as the first democratically elected prime minister of Serbia, there was reason to hope that many of these goals could be realized. Among Djindjic's first moves was to dismantle the hated Ministry of Information, which until then had governed the media with a heavy and often abusive hand. But by the time of Djindjic's assassination, his government was plagued with the infighting common to fractious groups that are victorious in their efforts to defeat a common enemy. Djindjic himself was dogged by rumors of mob ties. And the stuttering inadequacy of political, economic, and social reform in Serbia had been established.

Today, almost none of the hoped-for media reforms have been instituted. Where television was previously used as a tool for wartime propaganda, private stations have become a vehicle for personal attacks against business or political rivals.

Nor has the change of government brought about a renaissance in journalism. The removal of blatant cen-

sorship has indeed led to freedom of expression within the media, but Serbia desperately lacks serious, unbiased reporting. A handful of newspapers and magazines, such as *Danas* and *Vreme*, are developing solid news operations, but B92 is one of the only broadcasters to champion such an approach to news. Its influence is limited, however, and to many potential viewers B92's longstanding association with Western governments and nongovernmental organizations compromises its moral authority. Not even RTS can maintain an operation that is truly independent — its budget is now directly in the hands of the parliament, and the planned switch to a public subscription fee is languishing.

eanwhile, TV Pink continues to grow. Under Milosevic, the station was prohibited from broadcasting news or any other type of "information program." When it started its own news show after Milosevic's fall, the program was frequently a vehicle for partisan attacks, a fact that did not really distinguish it from most other news programs.

Today, Pink's "information programming" ranges from the evening news to talk shows to more recent additions such as *Split Images*, a popular satirical show in which Vojislav Kostunica, Serbia's current prime minister, is portrayed as a female opera star. More recently the journalism has generally appeared to be less overtly biased. Srdjan Bogosavljevic, who runs SMMRI, Belgrade's dominant polling outfit, says political attacks carried out through the media have gotten more sophisticated and subtle. The trend has been toward insinuation rather than the direct assaults and unsubstantiated accusations that were common in the past. These days, says Bogosavljevic, "If they are attacking somebody, they do it by quotation, not editorial."

All this has helped put Pink in a curious market position. Bogosavljevic says that people may watch Pink, but it embarrasses them. In surveys, people often claim, for example, that during the Milosevic years they got their news from opposition sources. "But when you interview them carefully," he says, "you can see by the answers they give that they were watching Pink."

Actually, the paradox of Pink goes well beyond embarrassment. For media reformers, Pink's continued success in the post-Milosevic era stands as a symbol of their failure. But dislike of Pink cuts across class and education lines. Two years ago, when I first encountered the Pink phenomenon, I was in Vojvodina, an agricultural region devastated by drought. I was interviewing a soybean farmer about his ravaged crops, but when he found out I had also been talking to people about Pink, all he wanted to do was tell me about its shady deals and questionable political connections. He was also an avid viewer.

Mitrovic once suggested to me that his programming, given its broad appeal, could be seen as something of a unifying force. But that is not really how he pitches TV Pink. Rather, he claims to represent an entirely different sort of reformist agenda: the creation in Serbia of a robust free-market economy. "For us, commercial programming is most important," he says. "We tore down monopolies, we were pioneers." As for the press's social obligations, Mitrovic is very clear that "it should not happen that Serbia gets only public service stations."

While Pink has clearly been forcing its competitors to try to match its commercial success, it has also done more than any other station to professionalize Serbian broadcasting. The station pioneered the use of ratings and people meters for making programming decisions, and although most large stations in Serbia now use these tools, Pink is the most aggressive in responding to the information they provide. From very early on, Mitrovic



Learn how to put science itself under the microscope

March 20 - 24, 2005 at MIT

an intensive workshop

### Investigating

- · Scientific fraud
- Malfeasance in research by industry, government & academia
- Outraged citizens' complaints
  - When good science does bad things

#### How to

- Cultivate reluctant sources
  - Follow paper trails
  - Mine databases
    - Use FOIA

Apply by **January 15** for fellowships covering travel, hotel & most meals.

http://web.mit.edu/knight-science boyce@mit.edu • 617-253-3442

Co-sponsored by



Knight Science Journalism Fellowships at MIT

8,



Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. concentrated on building solid advertising revenue — not necessarily a self-evident strategy in a media world that was emerging from socialist management. Bogosavljevic, whose firm has done polling for Pink, told me that Mitrovic is "the only one in Serbia with true media understanding."

Mitrovic himself presents an unlikely Balkan media mogul. He has a sort of affable, fleece-and-sneakers style that contrasts sharply with the Armani suits and Gucci shades that Serbian businessmen favor. He got his start playing bass guitar for a moderately successful rock band, and in the late 1980s launched a production company that broke the state grip on music production and distribution. From there it was a small step to radio and eventually television. When he was starting out, he says, "none of the big businessmen understood the power and profitability of the media."

The expansion of Mitrovic's broadcasting empire, however, is at least as much a testimony to his political savvy as it is to his business skills. His links to the Milosevic government seemed close enough that after sanctions against Serbia were lifted, the U.S. Treasury placed him on a list of individuals with whom American companies may not trade, a status that was finally lifted in May 2003. His JUL membership was, Mitrovic claims, a business transaction. "We were very powerful but we couldn't expand because of political pressure," he says. "The only way not to become a political station was to sacrifice myself instead of the TV station."

Even if Pink was not an overtly "political station," it became the center of a powerful cog in the Yugoslav wartime propaganda machine: Turbofolk music, a new sound that blended electronic dance rhythms with Serbian and Gypsy melodies and lyrics that ran from saccharine to nationalistic. Turbofolk worked at cross purposes to the rock and roll that B92 played, which conjured a street-fighting antiestablishment tradition that had become a battle cry for opposition groups and a perceived threat to the regime. Turbofolk helped reposition traditional values as part of the nationalist agenda, but it also helped to legitimate in pop culture an emerging class of paramilitary war criminals and gangsters. "There was a newly composed culture of crime emerging during the war," said Ivana Kronja, the author of a book on turbofolk and a professor at the University of Belgrade. "Milosevic promoted these criminals as a new middle class."

The ties between turbofolk and organized crime reached their apotheosis with the 1995 marriage of the busty hit singer "Ceca" to Zeljko "Arkan" Raznatovic, a notorious paramilitary leader, crime boss, and occasional guest on Pink talk shows during the war. Their wedding was a national event. After Arkan was gunned down in the lobby of Belgrade's Hotel Intercontinental in early 2000, Ceca seems to have kept her fingers in the family business. When she was arrested on suspicion of involvement in the assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic, it was because she had been hanging out

# Business Journalism.org

Updated Daily and Featuring:

- Glossary of 8,000 financial terms and dozens of "how-to" articles
- · Listings of the latest job openings in business sections around the country
- SEC filings, financial statements, company profiles and stock quotes for over 5,000 companies

## Now Offering Registration for FREE Online Business Journalism Seminars in 2005

- · "Personal Finance"
- · "Business Journalism Boot Camp"
- "Intermediate Business Journalism"

Jan. 24-28

Jan. 31 - Feb. 4

March 7-11



11690 Sunrise Valley Drive Reston, VA 20191

Andrew Leckey, Director, aleckey@americanpressinsuture.org

Funded by a grant from the Las Vegas, Nevada-based Donald W. Reynolds Foundation

with the key suspects, and the police had found a cache of weapons in her house. Ceca eventually walked, and although the affair embarrassed many Serbians, some found her apparent ties to the underworld to be another sign of her devotion to the Serb nation. "TV Pink institutionalized this culture," says Kronja.

For many involved with Serbian media - especially those who put their property, reputations, and lives at risk to fight Milosevic — this sort of collaboration with the regime was inexcusable. Yet the picture that emerges from Mitrovic's past is not one of a die-hard Milosevic insider, but rather an opportunist willing to toe whatever political line is necessary for him to stay in business. He has consistently showed an ability to stay a step ahead of Serbia's mercurial politics. As masses of protestors burned the RTS studios on October 5, 2000, TV Pink used its satellite uplink to broadcast to the world the now-famous images of the popular uprising, even before it was clear that the protestors would win and the regime would fall. Mitrovic quickly - and successfully - switched his allegiances to the new government of Zoran Djindjic.

"Nobody expected the new government to start handing out medals" to independent journalists, said Dejan Anastasijevic, a reporter for the magazine *Vreme* who was himself a vocal critic of Milosevic. "But what we definitely did not expect was that people like Mitrovic would get a free hand. It leaves a bitter taste."

edia reform in Serbia has centered on regulation, and especially the establishment of a functional, nonpartisan regulatory body that will insulate RTS from government pressures, enforce quality standards, and preside over what promises to be the biggest change to broadcast media since the introduction of free speech: the sale of up to five national frequencies. For companies like Pink and B92, both of which are likely to win a national frequency, this long-awaited change would help stabilize the market and simplify advertising and revenue planning. Other competitors for the frequencies include BK-TV and TV Palma, and RTS is almost certain to keep two of its current three frequencies. One frequency may also be opened to a foreign investor.

Efforts at market-based reform, however, have been disappointing so far. The Broadcasting Law, adopted in 2002 but still unenforced, calls for the establishment of the Broadcast Agency Council, which would act as the law's main enforcer and regulatory body. But from the start, the council's legal foundation was questionable and there was disagreement over its make-up. It never established legitimacy, and several local media organizations — including B92 — have boycotted it. European Union aid agencies, which had planned to provide 300,000 euros to help fund the council's operations, have suspended payments until the internal political battles are resolved. As GR went to press, the gov-

ernment was attempting to appoint a new council.

The failure to regulate has helped stifle a broad public discussion of what the role of the media has been — and should be — in Serbian society. It has never been clear, for example, whether private broadcasters such as Pink should have been made to pay some sort of reparations for the market advantages they attained under Milosevic.

But reformers have another, arguably much more fundamental problem than the feckless effort at regulation. The public service model championed by B92, as crucial as it may be to the development of a responsible press, doesn't resonate with viewers the way Pink's more colorful approach does. The central problem with B92's "truth and reconciliation" programming is that the people who watch it tend to be those who are already aware of the problematic role of Milosevic and Serbia in ethnic cleansing and the break-up of Yugoslavia. In 2001, for example, B92 showed a documentary on Srebrenica, a town in Bosnia that was the site, in 1995, of the massacre of some seven thousand Muslims by Bosnian Serbs. The documentary elicited little response. Yet several months later there was a public outcry and protests against the airing of the same documentary after it was shown on RTS, which reaches the much larger segment of the population that was not prepared to even consider Serbian complicity in the massacre. Belgrade intellectuals might dismiss RTS's audience for refusing to confront reality, but as a media outlet forwarding an agenda of social reform these are precisely the viewers B92 needs to reach.

Indeed, there is a sense in which the station can seem disconnected from the concerns of the country. One foreign adviser told me that when he suggested that B92 add traffic reports to its morning radio show, the idea was met with a slightly puzzled protest from the young urban staff: Why? We don't drive to work. More broadly, there is the simple fact that the grinding poverty in which most Serbians live tends to push media reform off the list of priorities. The unemployment rate is around 30 percent; and the average monthly wage, after taxes, is around 150 euros, or about \$200. So the attitude of many is that the present is difficult enough without dredging up the past, TV Pink now as then, offers refuge from reality.

A Western diplomat involved in media aid programs explained the divide as well as anyone: "The orthodox son of socialist self-management is public service," he says. "The market economy son is tit and shit."

n his effort to realign himself with the post-Milosevic power structure, Mitrovic built a valuable network of friends, including Vladimir "Beba" Popovic, who runs the local franchise of Ogilvy & Mather, headed media relations for Djindjic's government, and is infamous for a string of libe! suits he filed against independent media while holding that of-

G M F The German Marshall Fund of the United States

STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

## EUROPEAN JOURNALISM AWARDS

\$10,000 SENIOR AWARD, \$5,000 YOUNG JOURNALIST AWARD

Sixth annual Peter R. Weitz Prizes: for excellence in the reporting and analysis of European and Transatlantic affairs. Senior award open to all journalists working for American newspapers and magazines. Young journalist award for American journalists under 35. Awards honor Peter R. Weitz, late Director of Programs of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

GMF also offers journalism fellowships worth \$2,000 to \$25,000 for American and European journalists to encourage in-depth coverage of transatlantic affairs as well as of European issues in the U.S. media and of American issues in the European media.

### DEADLINE FOR JOURNALISM AWARDS: FEBRUARY 28, 2005

CONTACT: URSULA SOYEZ, GMF, 1744 R STREET NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20009 Tel: (202) 745-3950 Fax: (202) 265-1662 E-Mail: USOYEZ@GMFUS.ORG DETAILS ON APPLICATION PROCEDURE: WWW.GMFUS.ORG

#### The University of Michigan - Department of Communication Studies Howard R. Marsh Visiting Professorship in Journalism

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan seeks nominations and applications for the Howard R. Marsh Visiting Professorship in Journalism. The Howard R. Marsh Endowment provides funds for a one-semester or one-year visit from either a distinguished academic scholar who studies journalism and news media or an eminent professional journalist. The individual selected for this appointment will contribute to the education of students in the Department and College who are studying long-range factors affecting the ability of the news media to perform their functions in a democratic society.

The Marsh Visiting Professor will teach up to two courses per term, engage in additional dialogue with students and faculty, pursue current professional or scholarly interests, and contribute to the direction of the Howard R. Marsh Center for the Study of Journalistic Performance. The Center, located in the Department of Communication Studies, supports scholarly research on democratic functions of the news media.

Applicants for the Howard R. Marsh Visiting Professorship should send a vita, evidence of teaching excellence, and three letters of recommendation to: Marsh Professor Search, Department of Communication Studies, 2020 Frieze Building, 105 South State Street, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1285. Questions should be sent to: comm.studies.dept@umich.edu.

Review of nominations and applications for single-term or academic year appointments that would start in the Fall of 2005 will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled.

The University of Michigan is a non-discriminatory/affirmative action employer. Women and minorities are encouraged to apply. The University is responsive to the needs of dual career couples.

fice. Another friend is Giovanni Porta, who ran the Serbian media operations for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and was responsible for shaping decisions about coverage, fairness, and political influence. Mitrovic has also hired the Washington lobbying shop Barbour Griffith & Rogers, for commercial and trade purposes.

Porta recently took a job with TV Pink helping to set up its new operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Pink has been pushing hard into foreign markets, and in addition to Bosnia is broadcasting in Macedonia and Bulgaria. It is also trying to attract foreign media business to Serbia, and according to The Hollywood Reporter, its subsidiary, Pink Films International, signed a five-movie, \$20 million production deal with Grosvenor Park, a British horror film producer.

The rest of Serbia's media world is watching, and learning. B92 has almost entirely weaned itself from the foreign aid that kept it going under Milosevic. Five years ago, donations paid for a majority of operating expenses, but Sasa Mirkovic guesses that now they make up less than 10 percent. The station continues to put resources into its daily news report, as well as documentaries such as last year's award-winning Tapestry, which tells the story of postwar ethnic relations and reconciliation through a family's tapestry, lost in the battle of Vukovar. The station is also buying more popular programming, such as Sex and the City and European professional sports, which has led some old-school fans to grouse that B92 is selling out and straying from its antiestablishment roots. In the surest sign that commercialism is taking root, though, B92 brought in Robert Nemecek in 2003 to work on its entertainment programming, only to see RTS hire him away by the spring of last year. Nemecek's old boss? Zeljko Mitrovic at TV Pink.

Jared Manasek, a Brooklyn-based writer, lived and traveled in Central Europe and the Balkans from 1996 to 2002. He has written extensively on the region's politics, business, and economics.

## IDEAS & REVIEWS

ESSAY



GLAUCO DELLA SCIUCCA

## Let's Blame the Readers

Is it possible to do great journalism if the public does not care?

BY EVAN CORNOG

hat do the managing editors of America's newspapers talk about when they get together? Readers, and why there are fewer of them than there used to be. At the Associated Press Managing Editors convention in Louisville this fall, Topic A was declining readership. Stuart Wilk, the past APME president and associate editor of The Dallas Morning News, delivered a keynote speech that spoke of various ills facing the business — falling readership, sliding profits, circulation scandals. Bennie Ivory, executive editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, warned, "We're losing a lot of readership right now," and another speaker, the business consultant Vin Crosbie, diagnosed the industry as being in "critical condition." The gathering was not, of course, a wake, and much time was spent discussing what news people could do to turn the situation around. Yet for all the can-do spirit and guarded optimism that were in evidence, it was clear that many of the people at the APME meeting were worried about the future.

It is not hard to see why; the data on readership are consistent and depressing. Vin Crosbie pointed to statistics that showed that in 1964, 81 percent of Americans read a daily newspaper, while today that figure hovers around 54 percent. Soon newspaper readers will be a minority of the population, given the even more distressing figures he cited con-

cerning the reading habits of younger Americans. As recently as 1997, 39 percent of Americans 18 to 34 were reading newspapers regularly; by 2001 this had dropped to 26 percent. That statistic is even worse than it seems, because newspaper reading or nonreading - is a habit, like smoking or a preference for Coke or Pepsi, that once acquired tends to remain in place. The older Americans who are the mainstay of newspaper subscriber lists have been reading newspapers since their teens and twenties, and younger Americans who have not yet picked up the habit are not likely to develop it later in life.

The problem is not confined to newspapers, either. As the Project for Excellence in Journalism's report,

#### ESSAY

## **IDEAS & REVIEWS**

"The State of the News Media 2004," makes clear, other sources of news are also having trouble attracting younger customers. The three nightly network newscasts have seen their ratings plummet 44 percent since 1980.

A new study of the problem by David T. Z. Mindich, a journalism professor at Saint Michael's College in Vermont, provides a devastating survey of the extent of the problem. Ignorance of current events and indifference to the traditional news media are epidemic. And it is not only traditional news media that young people avoid; even the Internet, which some look to as the solution to the problem of a disengaged younger generation, is not being used as a source of news by most younger Americans. In his new book, Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News, Mindich cites a survey showing that "only 11% of young people cite the Internet as a major source of news." Younger Americans know plenty about the things that interest them - they just don't follow the news very closely.

This was not always so. In 1966 fully 60 percent of college freshmen believed that following politics was important, according to a survey by the University of California at Los Angeles; by 2003 that had fallen to 34 percent. Given the close correlation researchers have found between newspaper reading and active citizenship, the figures are worrisome for both the industry and the nation.

The managing editors' meeting was built around finding ways to lure new, younger readers into buying their papers. Session after session was organized with this purpose in mind, and to drive the point home the APME had flown in an assortment of "embedded readers" from around the country to comment upon the proceedings and give their own views in a special session of the convention. No one could accuse the newspaper folks of being indifferent

to their customers: "I have been treated like a celebrity all week," remarked one of these embedded readers, Angela Gallagher, a college student from Mississippi.

But what if the problem lies not with the newspapers, as the APME gathering seemed to believe, but with the readers? What if the readers have changed? If so, the solution to the problem will lie beyond the power of journalists alone.

onsider some recent history. In 2000, Robert D. Putnam, a political scientist at Harvard, published Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, a best-selling work that examined how Americans have retreated from all sorts of collective and communal activities in the past half-century. Putnam observed that organizations ranging from VFW posts to PTAs to bridge clubs to high-school bands were shutting down because there were not enough people interested in their goals to sustain them. What "the greatest generation" had built - both the spirit of common enterprise and the institutions that channeled that spirit — was disintegrating. Putnam subsequently tried to look on the brighter side in a book entitled Better Together that examined efforts to reverse this trend toward alienation and social isolation. Still, over the last few decades, the public realm has shrunk, and our private worlds have grown more isolated.

Perhaps the biggest force driving this change has been television, which provides easy and cheap entertainment that people can consume at home. Even though people, when polled, find TV to be a much less satisfying leisure activity than more active and sociable diversions, the power of the tube continues to rise. (And even TV watching has become less social — the family room has emptied out as each family member has acquired a personal TV set. Mindich points out that in 1970 only

6 percent of sixth graders had TVs in their rooms; today the figure is 77 percent.) Other factors have played a role in the decline of community. Suburbanization has made it less convenient to gather in groups, and the modern workplace, with its greater pressures and greater number of working mothers, leaves less time to pursue active leisure interests. More recent developments such as the Internet, video games, and the proliferation of gated communities have only intensified the decline.

To be fair, it must also be recognized that "the greatest generation" had greatness thrust upon them because they had to face the Great Depression and World War II. It is easier to embrace an ethic of shared sacrifice for the common good if your alternative is fascist tyranny. The recent decades of relative peace and prosperity (for many) have made fewer demands on our ability to act collectively, and it is hardly surprising that in the absence of such challenges our civic reflexes have grown rusty.

Newspapers have reflected this change in many ways. Obviously, as various community institutions fade in importance, so does the amount of coverage they receive (seen much on the labor-union beat lately?). As television has grown in importance, so has the space allotted to it in print media - not just in listings and reviews, but in coverage of TV celebrities, even the recently minted varieties that have started to emerge from reality shows. When news executives are asked why they put so much effort into covering celebrities, the answer is that "readers want it."

The editors in Louisville devoted one of their sessions to the subject, "Celebrity Coverage — Where's the Line . . . And Have We Crossed It?" But in addressing that topic much time was spent discussing how to use celebrity coverage to attract readers. Lorrie Lynch, who covers celebrities for USA Weekend, urged the editors to capitalize upon celebrity coverage to attract new readers. And the gossip columnist for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, known simply as C.J., offered advice on how to cover

celebrities if you don't have the good fortune to be in New York or Los Angeles.

Covering celebrities was just one of the attractions under consideration for luring new readers. Kim Leserman, president of the Media Insight Group, a market-research firm, outlined ways to use information about the interests of younger Americans to attract new readers. Robin Seymour, the director of research and readership at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, revealed the results of her research into the top items of interest for younger, so-called "light" readers. In order, they are: health/fitness, investigative reports on important issues, the environment, natural disasters/accidents, and education. It was repeatedly stressed that marketing efforts should not drive news judgment, but when there was a story that promised to appeal to a demographic group that the business folks were trying to reach, it should be widely promoted. Hank Klibanoff, the managing editor for news of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, announced, "I have seen the light. I have seen the value of research." He discussed ways that his paper was changing its zoned editions to respond to what they knew about reader desires. And what he presented was quite impressive.

Clearly, a declining newspaper business must pay attention to its customers' wants if it is to survive. Good ideas about how to do this were in abundance at the APME convention. And none of the journalists were saying that hard news coverage should be abandoned in pursuit of profits. But profits may be hard to come by if the public does not want to read the hard news.

At one APME event Michael Getler, ombudsman of *The Washington Post*, said the paper had received a lot of hate mail during the Watergate investigation, "from people who just didn't want to know what was going on." One of the embedded readers, a child-welfare worker from Delaware named John Bates, spoke of people he knew who did not like to read newspapers because the news is "so sad and depressing."

The embedded readers, who came across as an unusually thoughtful, engaged group, evidenced this tendency themselves. At one session the APME attendees and those of the affiliated meet-

ing of the Associated Press Photo Managers were asked to say whether they would have published certain grisly photographs on page one — a shot of Nicole Brown Simpson's corpse, the burned bodies of American civilian contractors hanging from a bridge in Falluja, and so forth. Electronic voting allowed members of the audience to identify themselves by job (as editors or photo editors), and the embedded readers were also asked to vote. One of the photos rated was the iconic Abu Ghraib photo of a prisoner standing on a box, hooded, with wires attached to each hand. Of those who identified themselves as photo editors, 96 percent said that they either ran or would have run the photo on page one. But 71 percent of the embedded readers said it should not have been run on page one. Asked about the propriety of running photos of terrorists holding hostages, 60 percent of the photo editors were in favor of printing the pictures, but 78 percent of the readers were opposed.

Why don't readers want to see these things? Why are so many people avoiding the hard task of keeping themselves informed about what is going on in their government and society? Why is ignorance so widespread at a time when higher education is more widely pursued than ever before?

So much of the thinking about this in the world of journalism (including in the pages of this magazine) is done from the perspective of the flaws of journalism as currently practiced. And so it should be, because such flaws abound, from the cutbacks in foreign bureaus to the commercialization of news to the high-profile crimes of a few journalistic fabricators. But perhaps the problem, and therefore the solution, has broader and deeper roots. Perhaps we should, to an extent, blame the readers. Perhaps the old notions of an engaged and virtuous citizenry, upon which the founding fathers' hopes for the republic were based, are archaic concepts.

Gourmet's editor, Ruth Reichl, when she was still the restaurant critic of *The New York Times*, once launched a review of Thomas Keller's Napa Valley restaurant, the French Laundry, with the observation, "The secret of the French Laundry is that Mr. Keller is the first American chef to understand that it takes more



## 2005

Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference

Hollywood, Calif. March 17-20

#### Presented by

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

> Panels that touch on every beat:

Census, crime, education, homeland security, government, FOI, the border, transportation and more

Spreadsheets, database

Spreadsheets, database managers, mapping, statistics and the latest in cutting-edge technology

#### 01110

Exhibitors, networking, software demonstrations

Special Advanced Day on Thursday

Renaissance Hollywood Hotel 755 N. Highland Ave Hollywood, CA 90028

Hosted by: KNBC-Los Angeles

Sponsors: Los Angeles Times The Orange County Register

Register online at: www.ire.org/ training/hollywood06 than great food and a great location to make a great restaurant: it also takes great customers." The greatest danger to American journalism in the coming decades is not commercial pressures or government regulation but the decline of public interest in public life, a serious disengagement of citizens from one of the primary duties of citizenship - to know what is happening in their government and society. Americans know a lot about a lot of things, but when only 41 percent of teenagers polled can name the three branches of government while 59 percent can name the Three Stooges, something is serious-

It is particularly ironic that this is happening in the United States, whose revolution and then founding were to a significant extent the product of debates carried out in pamphlets and newspapers. The greatest work of political philosophy ever composed in America, the Federalist Papers, was published serially in New York newspapers to support the ratification of the Constitution there. In recognition of the role that the press played in the nation's founding, and in appreciation of the crucial role it plays in maintaining a free society, the press was granted special protections under the First Amendment.

But the founders knew that a free press would be worth little if the people could not read it, so public education became one of the great obsessions of the leaders of the early republic. One of the founders of the New York Free School Society, the precursor of the public-school system in New York City, wrote that the "fundamental error of Europe" was restricting education to the wealthy, in the mistaken belief that "knowledge is the parent of sedition and insurrection." Instead, he wrote, education was vital to the maintenance of a free society. This concern with education was widespread in the founding generation, and Thomas Jefferson famously listed the establishment of the University of Virginia as one of the three great accomplishments of his life (he omitted his presidency from the list).

he idea of education as a prerequisite for responsible citizenship naturally gave rise, after a time, to the idea of citizenship education. What the historian Richard Hofstadter called the "consensus" society of the 1950s fostered a kind of citizenship education that stressed the institutions of American democracy, the commonality of all Americans regardless of background (although how this was actually expressed from state to state, particularly with regard to African Americans, was problematic), and the efficacy of citizens acting in groups to pursue change, whether those groups were political parties effecting changes in government through legislation or labor unions and corporations negotiating agreements governing wages and working

But the notion of citizenship education was always a contested one, with business groups looking to schools essentially to educate workers for a complex industrial society while others, particularly educators, favored more broadly democratic notions of citizenship education that sought to give students the tools they needed to think critically about their society and their roles in that society. According to Larry Cuban, a professor of education at Stanford University, it is "business-inspired reform coalitions" that have recast public education: "In doing so, the traditional and primary collective goal of public schools building literate citizens able to engage in democratic practices" the goal of American's founders -"has been replaced by the goal of social efficiency, that is, preparing students for a competitive labor market anchored in a swiftly changing economy." Clearly students need to be prepared to take their places in the work force; and public education has long sought to achieve that goal along with others. But the balance has shifted in the last generation. Cuban's new book, The Blackboard and the Bottom Line: Why Schools Can't Be Businesses, traces the rise of the social efficiency model over the last three decades. The federal "Nation at Risk" report of 1983 helped to define the nation's educational shortcomings in terms of America's perceived surrender of economic primacy to the industrial powerhouses of Japan and Germany. Although those economic threats have receded, if not evaporated, the prescription arrived at — more standardized tests of basic skills, and "teaching to the test" has become the orthodox political solution, embraced by both parties. (Senator Edward Kennedy voted for President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation, which the president, in one of the debates, described as a jobs bill.)

This redefinition of citizenship has been part of a larger push toward privatizing much that used to be public - and, in particular, governmental — in American society. For decades the Republican Party and allies in the business community have worked to reduce government's role in American life. It is a measure of their success that faith in democratic government has largely been replaced by faith in the market. It was the senior President Bush who urged upon the nation a less expansive model of civic engagement, which the speechwriter Peggy Noonan memorably expressed as "a thousand points of light." Implicit in this was the notion that collective action was not the only, or the best, way to remedy society's ills. Isolated individuals should try to do good - in isolation. Earlier generations had expressed different ideals. In his inaugural address in 1941, as the threat of world war drew ever closer to the United States. Franklin D. Roosevelt said that American democracy was strong "because it is built on the unhampered initiative of individual men and women joined together in a common enterprise." Sixty years later, after the September 11 attacks had shaken the nation, President George W. Bush urged Americans to pull together by going out and spending money, or taking a trip to Disney World. Consumerism had become the common cause.

President Bush also declared that younger Americans should be taught

to respond to the September 11 crisis, but his vision of how this should be done was very narrow. In announcing an effort to strengthen citizenship education in the wake of the attacks, Bush said the program's purpose was to teach that "America is a force for good in the world, bringing hope and freedom to other people." The goal was to prescribe, not to explore, what American citizenship is and means. And those who challenge their students to ask the hard questions are encountering difficulties. One Florida teacher who asked his class to discuss Benjamin Franklin's statement "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety" was disciplined by the school's principal for his departure from the required curriculum. Answers are safe; questions are not.

In a recent study of citizenship education published in PS: Political Science and Politics, the scholars Ioel Westheimer and Ioseph Kahne described three different varieties of citizenship: the "personally responsible citizen," the "participatory citizen," and the "justice-oriented citizen." To make clear the differences, they described sample actions for each: the first "contributes food to a food drive," the second "helps to organize a food drive," while the third "explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes." (Interestingly, David Mindich's study found that volunteerism has been rising among the young, even as they are becoming "less and less engaged politically.")

While each kind of action might be covered in the pages of a local newspaper, clearly it is the world of the justice-oriented citizen that intersects most clearly with the world of journalism, since "root causes" of problems are what journalists seek to identify, and uncovering injustices is one of the raisons d'être of reporters. And such a "justice-oriented" approach was common in the citizenship education of previous generations. This shift toward defining the citizen as consumer is a change that some, at least, saw coming.

ne thing that "everyone knows" is that Jimmy Carter made a fool of himself in the summer of 1979 by giving the famous "malaise speech," which is caricatured as a touchy-feely effort to avoid personal responsibility for the country's woes during the stagflation years of the late 1970s. Yet Carter's speech is a much more impressive document than such facile impressions convey, and in it he identified a

trend central to the matter at hand. The nation, he said then, was at a fork in the road, and had to choose between a "path that leads to fragmentation and self-interest" and "the path of common purpose and the restoration of American values." To choose the first, Carter said, was to embrace a world in which "human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns." We appear to have arrived at that destination. When



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BONFIGLI, CLASS OF 2001

# Turn kid stuff into strong stories

Get deeper into the social issues and programs that affect young lives. Our fellowships can enrich your understanding and coverage of education, health,

immigration and more. ■ Allexpenses-paid conferences in or near Washington, D.C., combine briefings, site visits and advanced journalism training. ■

Competitive fellowships provide stipends of \$500; select fellows receive \$7,500 to support projects



APPLY BY MARCH 5. For details about our program, based at the University of Maryland, see www.child-family.umd.edu

George W. Bush, at his party's 2004 convention, laid out his vision of America's future, it was of an "ownership society," where people would not only own their own homes but also "own their own health plans and have the confidence of owning a piece of their retirement." This "ownership society" is many things, and one of them is a premeditated privatization of responsibilities that government had taken on during the New Deal and Great Society epochs. Without debating the merits of the actual proposals, it is clear that a different role for government is envisaged, as is a different conception of citizenship. Looking after oneself, rather than sharing the burden, is the model.

It is a common lament of newsrooms that readers often skip over the long, thoughtful series on important topics in their haste to read the latest on the Hilton sisters or the specs on the best high-end cappuccino makers. Still, why not include some of that fluff? The occasional confection is fine as long as one eats a healthy, balanced diet. The problem is that Americans have grown too fond of sweets, both on their tables and in their newspapers. And the new tabloids, such as the Tribune Company's *RedEye*, that are aimed at the youth market seem geared to the attention span of a mayfly.

The editors at the APME convention probably cared more about hard news than celebrity coverage, and even if they may use the latter to hook younger readers, they are still trying to fulfill the traditional mission of a newspaper. But that may not be enough. One of the embedded readers, an Eckerd College professor of anthropology and American studies named Catherine M. Griggs, cautioned them that she was "not sure you can do it alone educators have to take the first steps." Put another way, schools need to play a role in forming the "great customers" who will ensure the future of first-class journalism.

But journalism has a role to play. too. Some of that role will be carried out through the sort of soul-searching and self-examination that characterized the APME convention. But the change in the definition of citizenship, and in citizenship education, has not arisen out of thin air. Interest groups, acting in public forums, have helped push the country along the path limmy Carter decried. And as Cuban pointed out in an interview with CJR, "Most newspapers have supported the standards and testing movement editorially," which has contributed to the decline of emphasis on civics education. With the best of motives, journalists have contributed to the very forces that undermine journalism's future.

Journalism does have a vested interest in the outcome of this debate. One attempt to deal with this set of issues was "civic journalism," which has faced serious opposition, and even mockery, within the journalistic community because it seemed to ask reporters and editors to lay aside their

## WHAT THE U.S. MILITARY DID NOT WANT YOU TO SEE



If not for the courage and tenacity of investigative reporters and their editors, the outrages at Abu Ghraib might never have been disclosed.

The SELDEN RING AWARD FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING recognizes reporters who know that the shameful truth is more important than saving face. The \$35,000 prize honors published investigative journalism that gets results. Like the diligent work of Gannett New Jersey's 2004 SELDEN RING AWARD-winning coverage of legislators' no-bid contract awards to employers, friends and party bosses that led to the unseating of eight incumbent lawmakers and the Garden State's largest nepotism scandal in more than a decade.

To apply for the 2005 SELDEN RING AWARD FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING, visit www.annenberg.usc.edu/seldenring or contact Michael Parks, Director, USC Annenberg's School of Journalism at 213.821.1226.

Deadline: February 1, 2005.

## USC ANNENBERG .

SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

3502 Watt Way ■ Los Angeles, California 90089 www.annenberg.usc.edu

concerns with objectivity and balance in order to effect change in society. As the journalism scholar James W. Carey, who teaches at Columbia, once pointed out, journalists do their best work simply "by encouraging the conditions of public discourse and life." They can do this within the accepted norms of the profession by covering the stories that are out there, and by recognizing that some of the stories they need to cover have to do with ideas - such as changing ideas of citizenship. And they need to explore how such ideas alter their own profession. When journalists think of their readers, viewers, and listeners primarily as market segments, not citizens, they risk surrendering their unique role. Yes, news organizations are businesses, and need to make money; but they are also a public trust. The more journalists accept, and play by, the rules of the market, the more they are likely to confirm President Bush's conception of the press as just another special-interest group.

Journalistic attempts to follow readers in their changing interests may lead down a rabbit-hole of everdiminishing returns. As journalism tries its best to chase this increasingly recalcitrant public, it risks losing sight of its own fundamental purpose. And making news more entertaining is not the answer, either. The news can't compete with the diversions put forth by Hollywood in films and on television. Jerry Bruckheimer is better at doing explosions than Andrew Heyward, and Angelina Jolie is more pleasing to gaze upon than Diane Sawyer. Even O.J. Simpson's white Ford Bronco is no match for The Fast and the Furious.

But don't forget the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinels* research on stories of most interest to younger readers — on its top-five list were stories on education. Readers do care about what happens in their children's schools. And so, even, do nonreaders. There is contention and bitter division here — the very stuff of good news stories.

And the diminishment of the commons has become a topic for some journalists in recent years, particularly since the publication of Bowling Alone. Bill McKibben wrote acutely on the subject last year in Mother lones, and David Shaw has described the force of this trend in journalism in the Los Angeles Times. There is plenty of room for more attention. By covering this ongoing effort to define or redefine — American citizenship, journalists can move the debate beyond their own profession, heeding Professor Griggs's admonition that journalists "can't do it alone." Fortunately, journalism does have the power to examine any aspect of society, and can in this way set in motion a debate that may help it put its own house in better order.

Evan Cornog is CJR's publisher and the author of The Power and the Story: How the Crafted Presidential Narrative Has Determined Political Success from George Washington to George W. Bush.



Congratulates the winners of its annual awards

TIM RUSSERT, NBC

SOL TAISHOFF BROADCAST AWARD

MARTIN BARON, THE BOSTON GLOBE GEORGE BEVERIDGE EDITOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

SEYMOUR HERSH

KIPLINGER DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTIONS TO JOURNALISM AWARD

PAUL KANE, Roll Call JULIE ROVNER, National Public Radio

EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED REPORTING OF CONGRESS

ALBERT E. FITZPATRICK

CHAIRMAN'S CITATION

JOHN SHERFFIUS

CLIFFORD K. & JAMES T, BERRYMAN AWARD FOR EDITORIAL CARTOONIST

CNN.COM

ONLINE JOURNALISM AWARD

The awards will be presented at the annual dinner February 17. For additional information, please call (202) 872-9081.

#### FIRST PERSON

## Caste and Class at The Washington Post

For one reporter, getting to the top wasn't enough



BY IVAN G. GOLDMAN

ne day in 1971 when I was twenty-eight years old a hot apricot pit fell into my lap. It flipped out of my dessert saucer as I ate lunch with my bosses Ben Bradlee, executive editor of *The Washington Post*, and its now-deceased publisher, Katharine Graham. I was the goalpost, so to speak, and they were on the sidelines, one at each elbow. I'd seen trouble

ahead as soon as otherwise kindly server dished a hot apriinto my saucer. Never before had I been served anything so foreign, and I had no idea how to eat it. As I looked for clues from Bradlee and Graham, I made a wrong move with my spoon and the popped into my lap like an enemy grenade. I knew 1 should do something, but what? As Graham and Bradlee pretended they weren't watching, the pit chomped its way through my career like Pacman. After too many moments it finally occurred to me that I should pick the

pit up with my fingers and place it in the saucer, which I did. But full recovery took many years. Each time I replayed the event in my mind it made me acutely aware that my father belonged to the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen union and I'd graduated from Southern Illinois University — one of those directional schools that had been shaped out of a state-run teachers college.

It's difficult to convey how im-

posing Graham and Bradlee were to me at the time. Graham was like Katharine Hepburn on one of her best days - stately, sophisticated, and, I thought, utterly unapproachable. Bradlee was exactly what he appeared to be - a Brahmin prince with talent. He used to classify his employees into two groups losers and pains in the ass. Most days he preferred the pains in the ass. If there is such a thing as a newspaper genius, Bradlee was it. He had to make dozens of tough decisions daily, and there was no time to appoint committees. Over and over, he decided correctly. He embraced that day-to-day pressure, and at night would hit the Washington social scene with every hair in place. Although he was an aristocrat down to his toes, his New England family lost its money in the crash of 1929. Subsequently, his father sat around the house in a tie with no place to go, a kind of male version of Blanche DuBois, but he depended on the kindness of relatives instead of strangers. I knew that Bradlee, a Harvard grad, had served as a wartime officer on a Navy destroyer, spoke French, and probably played all the upper-class sports in prep school. Some years earlier in his career, he'd placed representatives of Neusweek and the Post into the same room and made a match. Although his finder's fee was never disclosed, for the rest of his life he could buy tailored suits and holiday wherever he liked.

As a reporter I had already managed to deal with senators, leading entertainers, and other celebrities. But I'd never worked for any of them. Besides, they were all imitations compared to Bradlee, I had never known anyone remotely like him, and he scared the hell out of me.

Katharine Graham stepping out in New York in 1976

Graham and Bradlee were having lunch with me and two or three other reporters as part of some kind of rotation, but I don't think everyone on staff was part of the rotation. I don't know precisely why I was picked. Clearly they were making mental notes on our future. We were in a private area of the *Post* building, where Graham had a suite of rooms that included a kitchen. Everything was done by servants in white uniforms. Everything smelled good and expensive.

Another reporter at the table had been hired around the same time as I was. A privileged WASP Yalie, he demanded to know from Bradlee why the Post wasn't being recycled. He cut through all those imposing surroundings like a razor. Neither subservient nor obnoxious, he made Bradlee comfortable. They talked together like two old chums. I know it sounds odd. but at the time, I wasn't quite sure what recycling even was, so I had to stay out of the conversation and hope no one would try to include me. Recycling materials for use later was one of those issues taken up by people who had the leisure to think about such matters. During college I had spent my summers in Chicago workthey took him to a folk healer instead. He remained blind until the age of four, when the pox mysteriously went away. As a young man he'd escaped Lithuania to avoid serving in the army of a nation that he considered hopelessly anti-Semitic.

When my mother, Shirley Balaban, was thirteen, she and her older sister Sonia fled their Russian village in the middle of the night after a Christian friend warned my grandfather of an imminent pogrom. My mother and Aunt Sonia somehow made it to America but never saw their parents again. This was our family's personal experience with a dictatorship of the proletariat. My parents loved America with no less passion than Ensign Ben Bradlee, who crammed all his courses at Harvard into three years so he could get into the war. My dad always called the government "Uncle Sam," speaking of it as a living, breathing, kindly entity.

Southern Illinois University provided me with an excellent education, but my degree didn't add up to much at the *Post*, where at least half my co-workers were Ivy Leaguers. I grew up with friends who would see something they liked in a store win-

guy with a dry wit who'd earned the name Speed during Prohibition because he manned the shotgun on bootlegging runs.

After putting the paper to bed we'd sit in Speed's in coats and ties and greet a steady stream of other regulars — TV news people, hoods who always minded their manners in Speed's, and politicians. One was a nattily dressed probate judge who'd buy a round as soon as he came through the door. In Missouri, if someone died without a will, the probate judge would get a piece of the estate. "These drinks come courtesy of all those widows and orphans," the city editor would say, and the judge would just laugh.

Young women thought I had a cool job. It made me feel like Alan Ladd. I actually wore a trench coat. My specialty, if I had one, was writing feature stories about people in lower socioeconomic circumstances. When I'd been on staff nearly three years, a reader suggested I learn what it was like to try reentering society after a term at the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City. The editors liked the idea, and I agreed to do it. With the cooperation of prison

# We used to steal our winter coats from rich kids at the University of Chicago officials, I roamed around the prison

ing as a switchman for the Illinois Central Railroad. I remember wondering how college students registering African American voters in the South could spend entire summers without pulling down a paycheck. But it sounded far more enticing than dodging a runaway boxcar in a lonely freight yard at 2 a.m.

Back in Chicago my father, Sidney Goldman, had owned a small grocery, but it went under after he became chronically ill with heart disease. He subsequently was employed as a butcher, but jobs were sporadic because he could no longer lift big sides of beef. He had grown up in Lithuania. As an infant, he came down with some kind of pox that savaged even his eyeballs. His parents couldn't afford a doctor, so

dow and just break the glass and grab it. They didn't even warn me, and I'd have to run like hell. When I was a teenager we used to steal our winter coats from rich kids at the University of Chicago.

My first newspaper, *The Kansas City Star*, was a wonderful training ground. We were all keenly aware that Hemingway had been a reporter there before he joined the Red Cross ambulance service in Italy. The newsroom teemed with fascinating characters. My city editor had played a jazz trumpet during the twenties. Like so many entertainers of the time, he became friends with the mob guys who supplied the booze and owned many of the nightclubs. He introduced me to twelve-year-old Scotch. Our hangout was a bar owned by a tough old

officials, I roamed around the prison one day to get a feel for what excons left behind. This included the old, broken-down gym where inmate Sonny Liston learned to box.

Wearing the same work clothes given to departing cons, I left Jefferson City with the typical \$50 farewell stipend, minus the price of a Greyhound ticket to Kansas City. Posing as an ex-con. I looked for a job at the state employment office and day labor agencies, stayed in a flop hotel where the beds were so filthy I elected to sleep on the floor, ate in shabby diners, and finally found a job bussing dishes in a cafeteria. Throughout the experience, not one person smiled or spoke a kind word to me. When I got home, showered, and returned to the office. I wrote a story that was given huge play and made a big hit around town.

I sent the story to the *Post*, along with some others. Metropolitan editor Harry Rosenfeld loved the ex-con story. He invited me out for interviews. During my ten minutes with Bradlee, he was neither friendly nor hostile. He wanted to know the last book <sup>17-1</sup> read. He finally concluded our session by saying, "Hell, if Harry wants you, I guess he can have you." I didn't read this as a ringing endorsement. But I also recall he and many of the others loved the idea that I'd worked as a switchman, a steelworker, and a cab driver.

At one point I was gang-interviewed by several higher-ups. Playing good cop, bad cop, they alternated sweetness and challenge. Then Andrew Barnes, a Harvard grad who would later become chairman and

editor, had been a terrific writer before turning editor. In fact, he was a boy genius with two books under his belt by the time he was twenty-two. Taking a big chance, I went over Barnes's head to Downie and told him I had the makings of an excellent feature story, that Barnes wouldn't let me write it, and it would be dead after today. For all I knew Downie was Barnes's best friend and this would earn me my last kick out the door. "Okav, write sixteen inches and I'll look at it," he said, "but I don't promise anything." Next morning the story and accompanying photo were played prominently on the front of the Metro section. I'd come off the bench to score.

Bradlee called people like me "wordsmiths," his way of disparaging

many of them weren't nimble or tough enough to smash through the impediments and were let go after six months.

Once my editors learned I might turn moths into butterflies, they listened to me more carefully. For a while I even got to cover the House of Representatives. Everyone took my calls because I was a Washington Post reporter. Yet all this time I felt an inner anguish I could neither understand nor extinguish. I was surrounded by reporters, male and female, who were younger versions of Bradlee - supersophisticated, very capable people who dropped conversational tidbits about kicking back at the Hamptons and Martha's Vineyard, who knew all about wines and fabrics and lakes in Italy. They carried cloth handkerchiefs

# I felt an inner anguish I could neither understand nor extinguish and could distinguish

CEO of the *St. Petersburg Times*, looked up from my résumé and said, "Southern Illinois University. What was that like?" He asked it the same way one might ask a Watusi tribesman what it's like to drink blood from the veins of cattle. As I stammered out some kind of response, Harry interrupted with another question to kill the tension.

So at the age of twenty-seven, I became a Washington Post reporter. But the paper didn't lay out a red carpet for new reporters. My immediate superior, Bart Barnes, was a Yalie who wouldn't give me much to do, and I knew if I couldn't put out something impressive during the sixmonth probationary period I'd be let go. One day I came back from the District of Columbia jail with notes I'd taken on an alcoholic inmate. I knew I could craft it into something. Barnes didn't even want to hear about it. "You've got three inches," he told me. "We're swamped with good stories today." I realized that for reasons known only to him, he was steering me straight into the sixmonth junk heap.

Earlier I'd heard that Leonard Downie Jr., the assistant metropolitan

and complimenting someone at the same time. He wasn't much of a stylist himself, and made his career by getting the right information and putting it together fast. But he knew he needed feature writers like me, Tom Huth, Hank Burchard, Carl Bernstein, and (Bradlee's future wife) Sally Quinn. We were condiments he served with the main dish. The incident with Barnes and Downie taught me the number one Post rule - get a good story. That would overcome just about any of a reporter's faults. Famous screw-up Carl Bernstein had once left a rental car at the airport and forgotten about it. A huge bill came weeks later. But he was too good a writer to fire. Graham and Bradlee wanted to publish the greatest paper in America, and they knew they wouldn't get there by hiring a friend's nephew or niece. Each spot on the payroll was precious, a weapon to defeat the threat of mediocrity.

But if you didn't butt your way toward the front of the line, you wouldn't get there. If you weren't aggressive, talent was of little use at the *Post.* During my three years there, I never met a new employee who wasn't outstanding in some way. But

and could distinguish one school tie from another.

I quickly understood that my clothes and manner of speaking, even the food I ordered in restaurants, were hopelessly pedestrian. I had thought I'd graduated seamlessly into the middle class, but at the Post I learned I was a clumsy imposter. I could fool neither those around me nor myself. Other younger employees could find mentors in the upper reaches of the Post to help them through difficulties, but I had no idea how to do any of that. It took six months for Henry Higgins to mold Eliza Doolittle into a duchess. If a Higgins was around, I had no idea how to find him. I didn't even know I should be looking.

Much later, after I left the *Post*, I gradually came to understand more about my experience. There's something called the imposter syndrome. When people advance quickly, they can create a gap between how others see them and how they see themselves. They believe they're protecting the secret of terrible inadequacies and are in constant fear they will be unmasked. It's quite common among, for example, world-famous boxers, who generally come from the lowest socioeconomic stratum. When

they suddenly start earning millions, they feel unworthy.

hen I decided to leave the Post, the editors didn't understand it. People resigned, of course, but always to go on to something better to a high-paying p.r. gig or a column or a think tank. Not me. While journalists from all over the world were beating at the door, I was just walking away. Sensing a personal problem, they offered me a leave of absence to get my thoughts together. No thanks, I said, diving into an empty pool, I couldn't endure any more hot apricot pits. It wasn't too much later that I found myself working as a roofer in Aspen, Colorado, carrying buckets of hot tar up a ladder.

Eventually I would work my way back into journalism, and find the niche I should have been looking for many years earlier. I became a boxing writer. I learned that ethics-challenged insiders like Don King are not the essence of prizefighting. They're just jackals nipping at the edges. Prizefighters themselves are, for the most part, some of the kindest, most genuine people I've known. Though they typically come from a delinquent background, the nearly impossible demands of their training regimen drain them of hostility outside the ring and turn them into gentle warriors, sometimes witty, often wise.

Interaction with them on a regular basis helped me understand myself. Should an apricot fall in my lap again, I'm confident I could react reasonably well. But I don't beat myself up over the choices I've made. I doubt many of us are happy with every decision we've reached when life presented us with a fork in the road. That's why we identify with Marlon Brando's Terry Malloy, who cries in the rear of a New York taxi that he could have had class, he could have been a contender.

Ivan G. Goldman is a columnist for The Ring magazine. This article is adapted from his forthcoming book, Crazy Money: My Trip Through the Galaxy with Investor's Business Daily.

# FREE Single-Day Business Journalism Workshops

From Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism at the American Press Institute

## First cycle: "High-Intensity Business Coverage"

Balance sheets, SEC, ethics, private companies, business in all beats.

#### February and March 2005

Atlanta Cincinnati Dallas Kansas City, Mo. Memphis, Tenn. Mexico City, Mexico

New Orleans Orlando, Fla. Philadelphia

Salt Lake City Seattle Vermillion, S.D.

Check Web site for date of location near you.

## Plus: Workshops on SPECIALIZED TOPICS

April 5 Broadcast Business Journalism – (hosted by Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism)

April 8 Covering the Business of Health Care (*The Indianapolis Star*)

April 12 The Craft of Business Writing (Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University)

April 15 Covering the Business of Technology (Stanford University Graduate Program in Journalism) April 22 Covering the Business of Health Care (American University School of Communication, Washington, D.C.)

May 26 The Craft of Business Writing (New England Press Association at Northeastern University, Boston)

June + Covering the Business of Entertainment (Amenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California)

June 27 Covering the Business of Sports, (*The Boston Globe*)

More than 1,700 journalists from 639 newsrooms attended Reynolds Center at API workshops in 2004.

To register, go online to www.BusinessJournalism.org or contact Andrew Leckey, Director of the Reynolds Center, at 703-715-3329.

"It has helped me tremendously in finding resources to tackle some stories I have been wary to touch."

-Angela Smith
The Sun, Bremerton, Wash.



11690 Sunrise Valley Drive Reston, VA 20191

The Center is funded by a grant from the Las Vegas, Nevada-based Donald W. Reynolds Foundation

To register, visit www.BusinessJournalism.org

SECOND READ

## **CLOSE ENOUGH TO HURT**

## DALE MAHARIDGE ON LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN. BY JAMES AGEE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF 'LIVING' JOURNALISM

ome years ago I dined at the Harvard Lampoon, the closed society that publishes the zine. Located in a castle funded in part by William Randolph Hearst, the Lampoon's chambers harbor myriad relics: a medieval clock, a fourth-century stained-glass window, a conquistador's armor, a couch from San Simeon, altars of worship to writers such as James Agee. It was because of my relationship with Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Agee and Walker Evans's collaborative work about Alabama sharecroppers during the

Great Depression, that I'd been invited to socialize at the castle.

There was no electric light. eponymous humor maga- Dozens of candles illuminated the rooms. My host, the Lampoon president, sat in a throne six feet tall and four feet wide at the head of a long table. Dinner was served promptly at ten. Conversation was formal and strange jazz filled the air. I was astonished when, at meal's end, a man flung his plate to the floor. Suddenly there was a cacophony of crashing plates, spraying shards of porcelain; noodles hung from a coat of arms. Two men jumped atop the table and kicked off the remaining

plates. My host assured me this was normal. The china was broken every night.

"Who cleans up the mess?"

"We certainly don't. We hire help, servants. The Lampoon has more money than most colleges."

I was further astonished when men wearing ties attacked the piano with feet, fists, and chairs. The splintering of wood rose over the techno beat of the song, "Pump Up the Volume." The piano was old and a fresh one was being delivered the next day.

Amid this display, Lampoon members besieged me with ques-

> tions about Agee. hanging on my words. They talked admiringly of Agee's exploits in the Combat Zone, Boston's red-light district. The piano was now a heap of waste. Men stood smoking, sated. A woman cavorted in the rubble in a ghostly dance out of sync with the throbbing music. I flung my beer bottle against a wall; it exploded in a shower of glass. I fled and wandered the frozen streets of Cambridge, Agee on my mind.

Agee affects those who read him. For Jimmy Carter, whom I met in Nashville in 1989, the impact of



AT WORK: In this rare image of Agee, at left, on the job, he interviews Bud Fields, a sharecropper in Hale County, Alabama, in 1936. The photo, taken by Walker Evans, has been widely reprinted, but always with the writer cropped out.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men seemed to be moral and religious. For Tad Mosel, whom I met at the seventy-fifth Pulitzer Prize anniversary party in 1991, Agee's presence was supernatural. Mosel's 1961 Pulitzer-winning play, All the Way Home, was adapted from Agee's posthumously published novel, A Death in the Family. "I talked with him and asked him to forgive me when I changed things," Mosel said of communicating with Agee's spirit. "I talked with him for two years. Did he talk with you?"

Agee talks to me, but not as he did to Mosel or Carter, and certainly not as he does to the Lampoon members, who represent an extreme wing of a de facto Agee cult (Agee wrote for the Lampoon while at Harvard). Agee literally informs And Their Children After Them (1989), the book in which the photographer Michael Williamson and I documented the lives of the survivors and descendants of the three families with whom Agee lived in Alabama. We brought forward their story and the meaning of poverty and its fallout a half-century later.

Agee has informed my other books in a less topical but equally vital way. Joe Elbert, assistant managing editor for photography at The Washington Post (and Michael Williamson's boss), likes to give speeches excoriating editors, both print and photo, for not taking risks. Elbert doesn't edit conventionally, as in judging a photo on technical points. He considers how an image makes him feel. For what it takes to get this result, in photos or words, I always look to Agee. His was not cold, buttoned-down, dispassionate reportage. It was about danger, getting hot and sweaty, getting close, close enough to hurt, to feel something, to say something.

This is not a review of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which is indescribable anyway. One must read it. But be forewarned: it's uneven. Parts are, frankly, boring. But most of it captivates. The sum of

the whole is well worth the journey. Instead, I want to delve into Agee's journalistic process, a way of working that transcends his book. Agee embodies passion and soul, two qualities that some editors fear because they mistakenly equate them with bias, or having an agenda when covering the human side of social issues. Agee was not about doing journalism. He was about living it. This secret can be applied to book journalism, alternative weeklies, and even daily newspapers, though one must be stealthful with the latter. Agee described himself and Evans as "spies." If one works for a passionhating city editor, it's imperative to think and act like a spy.

gee was a poet before he was a spy. When he was twenty-five a book of his verse was published by Yale University Press. In 1932 the poet went straight from his Harvard graduation ceremony to Henry Luce's two-year-old Fortune magazine. Jobs were scarce, and Luce had been impressed by a spoof issue of Time that Agee had edited his senior year. The only reason Agee fit in at all at Fortune was the backdrop of the Great Depression - instead of solely glorifying wealth, Luce knew he had to publish sociological articles about the

Agee found himself stuck in the middle level of Luce's editorial assembly line, churning out his share of "mind-numbing assignments," according to his biographer, Laurence Bergreen. Yet he sometimes produced profound journalism — on the Tennessee Valley Authority, industrial smoke, the American road-

We talk of books standing the test of time. SECOND READ is an exploration of that maxim — journalists reflecting on books that shaped their own work, or whose lessons still resonate.

side. He wrote at night in the Chrysler Building, fifty-two floors above Manhattan's streets, blasting Beethoven on a portable record player, alone.

By 1935 he was languishing, and his work troubles flowed into his marriage. He wanted to reach heights with his writing but felt he was stumbling. He was disgusted with his bosses — even then editors feared passion — and went so far as to talk with his colleagues about a fantasy of shooting Luce dead.

"Who, what, where, when and why (or how) is the primal cliché and complacency of journalism," Agee wrote in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Because of how journalism was practiced, it was difficult to get at truth. Could journalism be blamed, he wrote, any more than a cow be blamed "for not being a horse?" Yes. "The difference is, and the reason one can respect or anyhow approve of the cow, that few cows can have the delusion or even the desire to be horses, and that none of them could get away with it even with a small part of the public. The very blood and semen of journalism, on the contrary, is a broad and successful form of lying. Remove that form of lying and you no longer have journalism."

He went on leave to Florida for six months in a failed attempt to save his marriage. He was adrift, proof that one's personal life is intertwined with the professional. He returned in 1936 to an assignment from *Fortune*'s managing editor: travel with Walker Evans to the South for a piece on the nine million cotton sharecroppers, the most hardscrabble poor in the nation.

The stakes were high as Agee and Evans hit the road that June. Agee's life, personal and professional, became wrapped up in the assignment. He could not fail. The pair cast about and found three families — the Woods, Gudgers, and Ricketts — on Hobe's Hill, a bleak plateau south of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

After a month Agee had a story,

## SECOND READ IDEAS & REVIEWS

but it was a cow masquerading as a horse. He left Evans in a Birmingham hotel and drove off in aimless despair, contemplating a roadside hooker whom he passed up, then a fight at a lunch counter likewise avoided. He ended up back on Hobe's Hill. A storm hit. George Gudger invited him to stay the night in the family's shotgun shack. Agee graciously declined, then hated himself for doing so as he drove down the mud-slick road. He had to get closer to the family, and he'd blown his chance. Then, either by accident or on purpose -Agee himself did not know - his car crashed into a ditch. He rolled up his pants and walked back to the Gudgers', where he lived for three weeks.

This is when Agee discovered the horse.

When he came home from Alabama in September, however, Luce had turned rightward from being a New Deal moderate. Sociological articles were out, and Agee and Evans's story was rejected. They decided to publish a book; to hell with Luce. Published in 1941 in a country mobilizing for war, the book was a commercial flop. Agee went on to make a name as a movie reviewer for Time and The Nation. He lived hard, drinking and smoking and womanizing, dying of a heart attack in a Manhattan taxi in 1955. He was forty-five. In 1958, A Death in the Family was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. In 1960, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men was reissued, racking up serious sales.

n 1982 I was given a copy of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by Diane Alters, a writer/editor colleague at *The Sacramento Bee.* Michael Williamson (another *Bee* colleague) and I were embarking upon our first book, *Journey to Nowhere*, about the new homeless,

and Diane wanted me to read Agee for inspiration.

The first time Agee affected how I approach my work was in Houston in 1983, when Michael and I met Jim and Bonnie Alexander and their two kids. Iim was a job-seeking welder, and the family ended up living in a tent. We set up camp next to them, living out of our car. We shared meals, played pool with Jim, got drunk, talked by campfire. On night six Iim showed us his pistol. Bonnie told about a dinner when there was just one potato. "Boy, I sliced it real thin," she said. "I'm never going to let that happen again," Jim said. "First, I'll go hunting for food. If that doesn't work, I hit a 7-Eleven. I won't take money. But I'll take food. My kids won't starve."

We wouldn't have achieved this degree of intimacy had we not lived with the family. This was relatively simple. Things were stunningly more complicated when Michael and I went to Alabama in 1985 to find the 128 survivors and offspring of the original twenty-two family members from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. None were still sharecropping — machines had ended that — but most were still at the bottom of the socioeconomic order. We unearthed a deeper lesson from Agee as we spent three years on the story.

We didn't literally move in with any of the descendants, but we emotionally set up house. We were invested to the core of our beings in the lives of those we were documenting. We didn't set out to do this. It just happened. It mattered not if our work never materialized into a book — for three years publishers rejected us. I had \$12,000 of my savings in the project. When things looked most hopeless, Michael spent \$1,500 he didn't have on a trip, for one photo. We had to journey to a conclusion even if the

story remained dormant in the notebooks and film negatives stored in our garages. It was personal.

gee was a strong influence on the "new journalism" of the 1960s, his biographer Bergreen and others have noted. While some laud Agee, others trash him. Many critics of new journalism and some who attempt its practice but fail miss a vital point about Agee's work. It was not really about "style," nor how Agee used the first person. Yes, Agee was a stylist, and he wasn't shy about using an "I." But these aspects are incidental to his journalism. More important was that Agee emotionally connected with the families. In order to get their stories, he gave of himself. He confronted the wall of "objectivity," of not getting close to one's subjects, and smashed through it.

This brand of reporting is akin to "method acting," in which actors take on the persona of the characters they are portraying. With journalism this means total immersion - method reporting. It started that day Agee showed up at the Gudgers' door, mudcaked, his car wrecked in a ditch. Earlier that afternoon during the storm, when he took refuge with the family in their shack, he focused on the eves of ten-year-old Maggie Louise Gudger, "temperatureless, keen, serene and wise and pure gray eyes." Looking into them, he wrote, was "scary as hell, and even more mysterious than frightening."

In the coming weeks he watched the family picking cotton. He took Maggie on rides through the county, told her about life in the big city. She was smart, and he saw in the girl hope for breaking out of the cycle of poverty. One night he perched her on the chicken coop, beneath the starry sky. Maggie wondered about her future. Agee later wrote that she might get her wish, and become a nurse or a teacher.

We were left with Maggie's hopes in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.* I found that she sharecropped until her second husband died in 1958, then became a waitress, raising her four children. Maggie descended into alcoholism and depression. She moved back home. One day in 1971 she stopped in a store to buy a bottle of something while her sister waited in the car. At home later the sister heard a thud. Rushing into the room, the sister saw the empty bottle whose contents had just been swallowed by Maggie. It was rat poison. The family tried to force saltwater down her throat, to make her expel it, but she clenched her teeth.

"I don't wanna live," Maggie said.
"I wanna die. I've took all I can take."

In And Their Children After Them I wrote, "They buried Maggie Louise at the edge of a hill, two miles up the road from where she had sat on the chicken coop that night and dreamed the stars."

I needed to see, feel, and smell everything connected to Maggie Louise, including Agee. Michael and I spent two days, sometimes on hands and knees, in a chigger-infested jungle of pine and kudzu seeking vestiges of the Gudger shack. I tracked Agee in New York City, through his daughter, ex-wife, friends; at Harvard, at the Lampoon. I obtained Maggie's suicide note and found her children, and we got to know some of them with an intensity that cannot be addressed here in any form that would do justice to the story.

There's no guidebook for this kind of work. It's about being human first, a journalist second. One has to submit to a story for which one has passion, and allow life to happen. The story does not exactly write itself; it is *journalisme verité*.

et Us Now Praise Famous Men was a bitter disappointment for Agee, "like a dead child," a friend of Agee's had told me, not to be discussed. He felt like a failure, and this led to increased drinking and smoking.

Did something happen in the South that darkly affected Agee as his life spiraled to its early end? He never again did a project like that book. Perhaps he'd said all he'd needed through this form of work, abandoning it just as he'd left poetry behind. Or possibly it was the children from two marriages he had to support and the impossibility of earning a living from this kind of journalism. Or maybe it was simply too emotionally costly. He turned in new directions, plunging into Hollywood. He wrote the screenplay for John Huston's African Queen, and biographer Bergreen notes that we see Agee in the brooding and boozing loner played by Humphrey Bogart.

My editor asked me if method journalism had affected me. It's a question that immediately raises another: How can one boil into a few

## There's no guidebook for this kind of work. It's about being human first, a journalist second

paragraphs the weight of the work's emotion, without sounding self-absorbed, or silly? But there are deeper reasons, whose nature is possibly not fully acknowledged to myself, for wanting to avoid the question of effects. I liken it to the cessation of a long-term romantic relationship. One moves on, yet the pains and joys remain below the surface for years and cannot really be discussed. Denial can rule. There's a danger in method reporting, outside any discussion about journalism. One does not walk away unscathed.

For years I continued to brush against the darkness of Agee's life — there were other intense experiences beyond the Lampoon dinner — and he became a mirror as I figured some things out, and learned the most important lesson from him. Agee is evidence that one can be too serious, too self-absorbed. It's vital to step back from this kind of work. It's one reason that I own an

off-the-grid house on the Pacific Coast where I live part of the year and tend to tomato plants and haul firewood.

Does this kind of journalism take a toll on those written about? We can look to Agee and Maggie Louise for some insight.

"Good God, if I have caused you any harm in this," Agee wrote about Maggie Louise in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, "if I have started within you any harmful change . . . forgive me if you can, despise me if you must."

Maggie Louise didn't read this until not long before she killed herself, family members told me, for Agee never sent them books and they didn't learn *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* existed until the 1960s. Was it a cruel reminder, after a life hard-lived, of her unrealized dreams? Her aunt and son said she never gave up her affection for Agee; she didn't seem outwardly upset.

Who really knows about any of this. What is certain is that Agee, the urbane writer from Harvard, a poet and Hollywood celebrity, and Maggie Louise Gudger, sharecropper and waitress, lived weirdly parallel lives. Maggie chose a direct path to her end: Agee's was less direct but equally willed, by hard drinking and ignoring his doctors. As I wrote in Children, "They were both dreamers and, deep down, tragic people who vearned for something they could not define even as they came to know finally that it had irretrievably escaped them. They died, though far apart in years and miles, at the same age — at forty five — as if defining a limit for the number of years of failed dreams a dreamer can be asked to endure."

Dale Maharidge, who teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, has collaborated with Michael Williamson on many books, including, most recently, Homeland (Seven Stories Press). In 1990, Maharidge and Williamson were awarded a Pulitzer Prize for And Their Children After Them (Pantheon).

## **IDEAS & REVIEWS**

BOOKS

## **NEWSROOM CONFIDENTIAL**

The Sins and Secrets of D.C.'s Media Elite

Reporting from Washington:
The History of the Washington Press Corps,
by Donald A. Ritchie.
Oxford University Press. 368 pp., \$30



LAUCO DELLA SCILICCA

#### BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

The country's elite journalists saw Washington, D.C., as a hardship post before Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1933. As Reporting from Washington tells it, the federal city was a cultural backwater that could not even produce a decent local newspaper, where boring presidents seemingly did nothing, and did not even do that very well. It was an information wasteland when Congress was in recess. It was a place of exile, far in mind, if not in miles, from the country's news center, New York City, where any ambitious journalist wanted to work.

Such an attitude persisted even as New York's Governor Roosevelt began his run for the 1932 Democratic nomination, according to the author Donald Ritchie, the associate historian of the U.S. Senate. In requiring Arthur Krock to leave his family in the city that never sleeps to take over the somnolent *New York Times* D.C. bureau, editor Arthur Hays Sulzberger said he felt "more or less like an executioner." Krock was dismayed, but was at least more dutiful than his several colleagues who refused the assignment.

But reporters are drawn to pow-

er as bears to honey. When FDR and his New Dealers began to fight the Great Depression, the Washington press corps surged in ranks to keep tabs on the blossoming relief agencies, flowering recovery plans, and manic missteps that marked the birth of Big Government — whose era has never ended, despite what late twentieth-century politicians might have claimed.

Covering the period from 1932 to September 11, 2001, Reporting from Washington deftly recaps the days when syndicated columnists could see presidents on demand, when entrenched white male reporters resisted the idea of black and female journalists, when the old guard fought to stymie new media technologies. Even in the retelling, one is astonished at how newspaper moguls who controlled The Associated Press prevented radio from subscribing to the wire. They relented only when the networks agreed in the mid-1930s to withhold all news stories (except bulletins) for twelve hours and to air news only twice a day, after morning and evening papers had hit the stands. Newspaper execs who thought the news happened only on their schedule deserved the extinction that many of their descendants are now facing.

This book can be engrossing, especially when it describes journalists who deviated from their avowed role as sober watchdogs. For example:

We see Arthur Krock ghostwrite Joseph P. Kennedy's 1936 book *I'm for Roosevelt* after using his *Times* opinion column to tout Kennedy for a White House post. But when Kennedy criticizes FDR in a letter to Krock, the newsman slips it to the White House in order to curry favor with Roosevelt at his patron's expense. What a Krock!

We see the *Chicago Tribune* D.C. bureau chief Arthur Sears Henning casting his fate to conventional wisdom in November 1948. He writes of the presidential results at 9 a.m. on Election Day, repeatedly dismisses as "nonsense" AP reports that incumbent Harry S. Truman is running strong, and then goes on radio that evening to explain why Thomas E. Dewey won. Postmodernists who insist the press "constructs" the news should take note that this Dewey Defeats Truman debacle earned Henning his walking papers.

Reporting from Washington should remind sky-is-falling press critics there is little new in the current trend toward ideo-

logical reporting and attack-dog journalism. The hard-line publisher Colonel Robert R. McCormick's Chicago Tribune, for instance, likely had as steep or steeper a conservative slant in the 1930s than do Sinclair and Fox News today. McCormick's Washington reporters learned they would catch hell for failing to tailor their news copy to fit the isolationist, anti-New Deal pattern laid out each day on the editorial page.

By the same token, Matt Drudge stood squarely on the shoulders of the columnist Drew Pearson when he leveled false wife-beating charges against a Clinton aide, Sidney Blumenthal, in 1997. In addition to solid scoops, Pearson's column continued a steady string of falsehoods for years, including a 1949 report that Defense Secretary James V. Forrestal had cowered inside his townhouse while his wife was being robbed at gunpoint at their front door. Forrestal committed suicide soon afterward though not, it must be said, entirely as a result of Pearson.

The book reprises publication of the Pentagon papers, exposure of Watergate and the My Lai massacre, and other examples of crucial watchdogging. But Reporting from Washington also notes that the press tends to embrace the "prevailing national consensus." Ritchie doesn't develop this point, but the big stories listed above broke when the elites of Washington were at odds over Vietnam and Richard Nixon. Likewise, the 2004 exclusives on Abu Ghraib prison abuse and hyped intelligence about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq came when vocal Democrats (and a few Republicans) in Congress were sharply questioning the wisdom of our current incursion into Mesopotamia.

On the other hand, President Reagan was so popular in 1986 that the D.C. press dogs had all but stopped hunting. It took a newspaper in Lebanon to get the scent of the Iran arms-for-hostages scandal. When Democratic opposition to the pending war in Iraq collapsed in 2002, the press muted its skepticism as well.

Ritchie describes the D.C. news media as a "fourth branch of the government," but in reality they are afraid to operate independently of institutional political opposition. That means the press is least likely to serve as a check on official abuses or blunders when its critical attention is most needed.

In fact, far from curbing the excesses of the White House or Congress with reliable consistency, news media have often contributed to those very excesses, as when the U.S. reporting on the eve of the 2003 Iraq invasion took up the war howl. And as when stenographic journalism helped demagogues from Senator Joseph McCarthy to the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth slice up their targets.

There is also a journalistic tradition of helping presidents dissemble, as when they float an idea anonymously and back off if public reaction is negative. Ritchie suggests that FDR would have suffered less damage if he had floated his notorious court-packing scheme as such a trial balloon. Ritchie forgets to mention the anonymous, successive, foreshadowing disclosure ("slow leak"), perfected in the Johnson administration. The planned tax hike or draft call is "under consideration," then "under strong consideration," then "more likely than not." That allows the public to vent and prepare, so the president takes a lighter hit when he makes it official. As Neil MacNeil, a senior editor at The New York Times in the 1930s and '40s, is quoted as saying in Reporting from Washington, "One of the major functions of the press in a democracy is to act as a cushion for unpleasant news."

Even so, given the rising calls for accountability in journalism, Washington media might consider inserting pictographs to make the news process a tad more transparent: a balloon icon for trial ballon leaks, an icon with a "4" casting a shadow, for foreshadowing leaks, a

## THE NEW NEW JOURNALISM

CONVERSATIONS WITH AMERICA'S BEST NONFICTION WRITERS ON THEIR CRAFT

EDITED BY
ROBERT BOYNTON



Vintage | Paper | 496 pp | \$13.00

## THE NEWS ABOUT THE NEWS

AMERICAN JOURNALISM
IN PERIL
BY LEONARD DOWNIE JR.
& ROBERT G. KAISER



Vintage | Paper | 320 pp | \$14.00



knife for stab-in-the-back leaks, a blowfish for puffery leaks, etc.

The book's most sizzling sections - a kind of press corps confidential - deal with the surprising number of reporters who sinned secretly by assisting the politicians they were assigned to cover while continuing to maintain an observer's facade. Krock's covert aid to Joseph Kennedy was no aberration. The columnist Joseph Alsop and Washington Post publisher Phil Graham flew to Los Angeles in 1960 to urge John F. Kennedy to pick a particular running mate: Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1950, the Chicago Tribune reporter Willard Edwards secretly turned his files over to Senator Joseph McCarthy. A Washington Times-Herald reporter, Ed Nellor, used those files to outline the speech that launched McCarthy on his campaign of anti-Communist character assassination. Edwards then reported on the speech, including parts that exaggerated what

the files said about Communist infiltration of the State Department. Before long, Edwards had become McCarthy's "loyal supporter and publicist," mapping strategy for the Wisconsin senator and drafting speeches alongside Nellor, who claimed to have written about five hundred himself. Both men continued to report and draw their newspaper salaries, apparently seeing no ethical conflict in their dou-

When Jack Anderson was an aide to Drew Pearson in the early 1950s. he rifled his boss's files to provide fresh dirt for McCarthy, even though his boss was a sworn enemy of the Wisconsin Republican. McCarthy returned the favor by letting Anderson listen on the extension during supposedly confidential conversations with Republican leaders.

The Des Moines Register investigative reporter Clark Mollenhoff made enemies by deriding press colleagues as pawns of the government. But behind the scenes, he

provided dirt to the Senate panel investigating Teamsters President Jimmy Hoffa. The committee's top staff member, Robert Kennedy, gave Mollenhoff a key to his office so the reporter could go through sensitive files and "leak" to himself any information he wanted to report!

Mollenhoff later worked at least as closely with Congressional Republicans, briefly joined the Nixon administration, returned to the paper, but never overcame suspicions that he was still a GOP operative.

One is left wondering how many of today's Washington reporters have secretly gone over to the dark

Why journalists cross that line deserves a study in itself. Ritchie suggests that Mollenhoff's zeal to be on the inside, changing the world, lured him in, and that Jack Anderson was currying favor with supersource McCarthy.

One suspects that the Krocks and Alsops might have wanted to wield the same power as the politicians

## Congratulations to the winners of the 2004

## Nancy

## Dickerson

## Whitehead

## Awards

for Excellence in Reporting on Drug and Alcohol Problems



Drug Strategies

Drug Strategies is a nonprofit research institute based in Washington, D.C. For more information about Drug Strategies and the Nancy Dickerson Whitehead Awards, including past winners, please visit our website at www.drugstrategies.org.

#### **Broadcast Award**

ABC News/PJ Productions Peter Jennings Reporting: "Ecstasy Rising"

## First Place Print Award

The Post-Star The Cost of Fun: Stories of Teen Drinking" (Glens Falls, NY)

#### Second Place Print Award

Fred Schulte South Florida Sun-Sentinel "Drugging the Poor" (Fort Lauderdale, FL)

### Special Mention People Magazine

Drug Strategies is now accepting submissions for the year 2005 Nancy Dickerson Whitehead Awards. Winners must demonstrate the highest standards of reporting on drug and alcohol issues. The awards honor the late Nancy Dickerson Whitehead's deep commitment to finding more effective answers to the nation's drug problems.

Each year, \$10,000 is awarded in each of two categories. There is a \$10,000 award for print coverage of drug and alcohol problems and a \$10,000 award for broadcast or electronic media coverage. Entries must consist of a single article or broadcast or a series of related articles or broadcasts published or aired between June 2, 2004 and June 1, 2005. The entry deadline is June 15, 2005. Awards will be presented at a luncheon in New York in November 2005.

For information and applications for the year 2005 Awards Nancy Dickerson Whitehead Awards contact: 1250 "Eye" Street, N.W., Suite 800

> Washington, D.C. 20005 email: prsolutions@prsolutionsdc.com

Awards Committee:	
Marie Brenner	Bill Moyers
Joan Ganz Cooney	Peggy Noonan
Walter Cronkite	Diane Sawyer
John Dickerson	Lesley Stahl
Katharine Graham (1917-2001)	Mark Whitaker

## New York University

## TENURE TRACK OR TENURED POSITION

Department of Journalism

#### FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

The Department of Journalism in the Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University invites applications for a full-time, tenure-track or tenured position, rank commensurate with qualifications, field open. The Department seeks an accomplished, innovative journalist or educator with extensive professional and/or academic experience and a distinguished publishing or broadcast record, who has made and is expected to continue making a significant contribution to public knowledge and understanding of contemporary affairs. Teaching experience is desirable. Masters degree or Ph.D helpful but not required.

Position will begin September 1, 2005, pending budgetary and administrative approval. Send cover letter, resume or curriculum vitae and two samples of your work by January 5, 2005 to Professor Ellen Willis, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Arts and Science, New York University, 10 Washington Place, New York, NY 10003.

NYU is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

## New York University

## CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Department of Journalism

#### FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

The Department of Journalism in the Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University invites applications for three full-time. non-tenure-track positions at the rank of Clinical Assistant Professor. We are seeking accomplished journalists with a passion for teaching the basics of journalism and extensive professional experience in newspaper and/or magazine journalism. Duties include teaching three sections a semester of introductory graduate and undergraduate classes in basic writing and reporting, as well as preparing courses and consulting on curriculum issues during the summer.

The successful candidates will have good industry contacts and a desire to help build our distinguished, innovative and distinctive basic reporting program – one that is both professionally oriented and intellectually rich. Teaching experience is desirable. Master's degree helpful but not required.

Positions will begin September 1, 2005, pending budgetary and administrative approval. Send cover letter and resume, by January 5, 2005, to Professor William Serrin, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Arts and Science, New York University, 10 Washington Place, New York, NY 10003.

NYU is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

with whom they socialized, just as politicians so often develop an itch for the riches of those who bankroll their campaigns.

Alsop, incidentally, was wielding far too much power just as a columnist. His reports that the Soviet Union had outpaced the United States in nuclear rocket production led candidate John F. Kennedy to hammer the "missile gap" issue, raising the fear factor in the 1960 campaign. But it turned out Alsop had based his story on CIA intelligence estimates that were ambiguous. Sound familiar?

or all its appeal, Reporting from Washington is weak in explication. The reader must pull patterns and themes from a thicket of facts without enough help from the author.

Reporting from Washington is repetitive, which makes its many omissions all the more aggravating. We get no mention of how Washington's campaign correspondents ended up vetting candidates in presidential primaries, filling a void left in the 1970s and 1980s when political bosses lost the power to pick the nominees. Many of these reporters publicly urged the parties to find a way to regain control over the nomination process. Unfortunately, the parties obliged by turning control of the system over to big money.

Reporting from Washington also lacks any sustained account of how public relations armies have burgeoned all over Washington, turning the capital into a huge, perpetual pseudo-event, making some reporters crave assignments where news actually unfolds on its own — civil wars in Africa, for instance.

The book makes scant reference to the Bay of Pigs fiasco, where *The New York Times* muted a story that might have averted destruction of an anti-Castro army. Or to the Cuban Missile Crisis, where reporters operated as superpower go-betweens and helped avert nuclear war. Or to the press's role in undoing House Speakers Jim Wright and Newt Gingrich, Senators Harrison Williams, Brock Adams, and Bob Packwood. (And Ritchie is associate historian of the U.S. Senate!)

In short, this is a very rough first draft of history. Every historian has to choose and to discard. But Ritchie has left a great deal for future historians to address.

Christopher Hanson spent twenty years as a print reporter, mostly in Washington. He teaches journalism at the University of Maryland

## COLUMBIA

# **Covering Globalization**

A Handbook for Reporters

#### Anya Schiffrin and Amer Bisat, Eds.

Introduction by Joseph E. Stiglitz

This invaluable resource will help reporters write about pressing issues in developing nations, including subjects such as: banking and banking crises, pension reform, privatization, trade agreements, central banks, the World Bank, sovereign debt restructuring, commodity markets, corporate governance, poverty-eradication programs, and the "resource curse."

"This volume belongs on every business reporter's and editor's desk."—TIME Europe

368 pages \$34.50 paper • \$69.50 cloth

# The Layers of Magazine Editing

#### Michael Robert Evans

Based on observations from the editors of more than sixty magazines, from the *Atlantic* to National Geographic, this book offers advice on everything from the shaping a magazine's editorial identity to the nuts and bolts of text editing.

"I've come across no other book that has covered so thoroughly and so passionately all aspects of magazine editing."—Peter Jacobi, University of Indiana

256 pages \$29.50 paper • \$64.50 cloth

columbia.edu/cu/cup

#### BY JAMES BOYLAN

#### NEWSPAPERMEN: HUGH CUDLIPP, CECIL HARMSWORTH KING AND THE GLORY DAYS OF FLEET STREET

By Ruth Dudley Edwards Secker & Warburg 484 pp. \$40; \$22.99 paper

The term "glory days" in the subtitle of Newspapermen refers to the long period of the last century when English newspaper publishers and editors held to the delusion (or maybe it wasn't a delusion) that they were running the country. These were the years of ascendancy of the subjects of this double biography. Cecil Harmsworth King (1901-1987) was a nephew of the press baron Alfred Harmsworth, Viscount Northcliffe, and a member of a large. handsome, powerful, and dysfunctional publishing family. King, a human juggernaut, worked his way up through the family business until he commanded the whole empire. which was centered on the Daily Mirror, for a time the newspaper with the world's largest daily circulation. His chief collaborator, Hugh Cudlipp (1913-1998), an agile, talented Welshman, pumped the blood of sensation and Labour politics into the Mirror's veins. For thirty odd-couple years, they collaborated, trying to dictate the course of the declining empire. The partnership ended in 1968, when Cudlipp, astonishingly, staged a coup that ousted King from the company's helm. Edwards offers too much King and too little Cudlipp in this chronicle - the soap-opera lives of the King/Harmsworth family become tedious - but the story is an amazing one. The Napoleonic strategies of the two principals in trying to bring British politicians to their knees - their combination of audacity, self-regard, and booziness take at least an American reader's breath away.



#### HATCHET JOBS AND HARDBALL: THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN POLITICAL SLANG

Edited by Grant Barrett Oxford University Press 302 pp. \$25

L. Mencken wrote in The · American Language (1921): "The newspapers originate and propagate slang, particularly in politics. Most of our political slangterms since the Civil War, from pork-barrel to steam-roller, have been their inventions." Judging from Hatchet Jobs and Hardball, what Mencken wrote still holds true: most of the entries have been originated or plagiarized by journalists, and a few of the terms refer to journalism itself: background, dope story, leak, and zoo plane among them. Perhaps their overuse in the media is the reason that so many of the entries seem tired, lacking their former sting. But careful perusal will turn up a scattering of terms that are not entirely familiar: alderman (a paunch), leg treasurer (fleeing embezzler), granfalloon (a big, meaningless organization, from Kurt Vonnegut), and kangaroo ticket (stronger in the hindquarters than the front). Incidentally, Mencken's example, steam-roller, is not included.

#### IT'S ONE O'CLOCK AND HERE IS MARY MARGARET MCBRIDE: A RADIO BIOGRAPHY

By Susan Ware New York University Press 336 pp. \$29.95

C eeking to make Mary Margaret McBride (1899-1976) comprehensible to today's readers, Susan Ware suggests that McBride was the Oprah Winfrey of her day. She finds parallels in their talk/interview broadcast formats, their celebrity, and even their weight problems. The comparison informs, so far as it goes; but Mary Margaret McBride's day was another era the middle years of the twentieth century - and her medium was commercial radio, then undisputed monarch of mass media. Her intimate manner and warm Missouri voice were as superbly fitted to radio as Oprah's persona is to television. McBride was able to make her way unscripted through fortyfive minutes of soliloquy, personalized commercials, and interviews with often eminent guests (Eleanor Roosevelt was her favorite: Langston Hughes was another). While pretending to be engaged in casual talk, she brought glimpses of the greater world to an audience of millions, mostly women at home. Beyond her life on radio, there is not a lot to her biography. She went to the University of Missouri journalism school, had a brief newspaper and freelance career in New York, shifted to radio, remained unmarried, had a longtime friend in Stella Karn, her manager, and after losing out to television lived out her days doing very small-time radio in upstate New York. Ware, who previously wrote a biography of Amelia Earhart and is editor of Notable American Women, has restored McBride to a rightful place in broadcasting history.

## SCENE

## Chewing the Q'at



BY GEOFFREY CRAIG

t 5 p.m. I arrive at the home of Ali Saif, a former member of Parliament, on a quiet side street in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. It is a Monday in late August, and this is the weekly gathering of opposition journalists. Outside the *mafraj*, or sitting room, is a massive pile of sandals; inside, cushions line the walls and a thin plastic sheet — littered with the waxy green leaves and branches of discarded q'at — covers the floor. Q'at is a shrub cultivated by farmers in Yemen's fertile mountains. Its twigs, stems, and shoots are chewed like tobacco, releasing a stimulant, cathinone, which produces an amphetamine-like buzz. Q'at is illegal in the U.S. but it is Yemen's social lubricant of choice. No midafternoon conversation would be complete without it.

About thirty men, mostly middle-aged, many wearing a traditional white robe and *jambiya* — the curved dagger tucked into a thick, embroidered belt — are seated on the cushions. They talk, read newspapers, smoke cigarettes, and tend to text messages. A small fan wheezes away.

Opposition journalists are a rare breed in this poor nation of twenty million. They are a disparate group — socialists, communists, Arab nationalists, and Islamists — with little in common beyond a sharp tongue for the current regime. Many have been punished for things they have written. At Ali Saif's salon, persecuted journalists not only get commiseration, they also devise ways — however quixotic — to fight back.

The question before the group today is how to help the editors at the weekly *Al Shoura*. In August, the government threatened to shut down *Al Shoura* and jail its editor, Abdul Kareem Al-Khaiwani, for criticizing the government's handling of a standoff between the military and a rebel cleric. The confrontation turned into a bloody siege that dragged on for the entire summer, ending only after the cleric had been killed.

The official explanation, parroted on state TV and in the larger papers, was that the cleric — who railed against the corrupting influence of the West — was a terrorist. *Al Shoura*, though, spanked the government for being ill prepared to take on the cleric, for killing civilians while waging its military campaign against him, and for sowing the seeds of terrorism. In August, *Al Shoura* was charged with slander. The judge declined *Al Shoura*'s request to present a defense.

As Al-Khaiwani talked, the rest of us sat, listened, and, of course, chewed. For me, q'at had the effect of a strong cup of coffee. My grasp of Arabic is limited, but following the conversation became easier the longer I chewed.

After two hours, Ali Saif wrapped up the meeting and circulated a petition, calling for the government to drop its case against *Al Shoura*. Despite their efforts, in early September, a judge closed *Al Shoura* for six months and sentenced Al-Khaiwani to serve a year in Sana'a's Central Prison.

In November, after reports surfaced that Al-Khaiwani had his jaw broken by another inmate, dozens of journalists demanded to see their colleague. Their request was denied. There would be more to discuss at Ali's.

Geoffrey Craig is a graduate student in international affairs at Columbia University.

# The Lower case

# World affairs concern Bush

(Palo Alto, Calif.) Daily News 1/9/04

Navy changes skirt policy, making apparel optional

The San Diego Union-Tribune 10/18/0-

Sex abuse crisis drove leader of U.S. bishops 'to my knees'

The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer 11/2/04

Bears get flu shots despite shortage

Chicago Tribune 10/22/04

Dallas cops to get off desk sooner after deaths

San Antonio Express-News 11/13/04

Edna St. Vincent Millay to speak

> The (Belmont/San Carlos, Calif.) Independent 9/4/04

A panel of representatives from the sports world met to discuss performance-enhancing drug use at the Journalism School last night.

Columbia (University) Spectator 12/1/04

Congresswoman Barbara Lee Announces 9th Congressional District Apparitions Projects

The Oakland (Calif.) Globe 1/24-30/04

Mother Abandoned as a Child Reclaims Her Own Children

The New York Times 11/30/04

City of Appleton expects to hit turnout of 125 percent; voting places close at 8 p.m.

The (Fox River Valley, Wis.) Post-Crescent 11/2/04

Retrial Ends in Murder of Senator's Daughter

Los Angeles Daily Journal 10/9/03

Body found in K.C. tied to 5 others

The (Fox River Valley, Wis.)
Post-Crescent 9/5/04

Warnings on river, lake fish jump

USA Today 8/25/04

## THE BIGGEST THREAT TO YOUR FREEDOM COMES FROM WITHIN.

It's not the latest corporate scandal. It's not covert government operations.

It's not even politicians. The most immediate, persistent, avoidable threat to your freedom is you.

You are the only one who can keep yourself from voting. From writing a letter to your congressman.

From participating in a rally. From reading a newspaper.



Secretary Posts CH

Keep freedom strong. Exercise it. Learn how at explorefreedomUSA.org.

## Broken system...shattered lives



When child protection services break down, the consequences can be fatal. In North Carolina, where 119 children died from abuse or neglect in just five years, something had to be done. An investigation by The Charlotte Observer finally forced the state to take action.

Children aren't supposed to die. But in North Carolina, 119 kids — many of them defenseless infants or toddlers — had become victims of suspected abuse and neglect. Their deaths could have been prevented, but an underfunded state agency and overburdened social workers just couldn't keep up with burgeoning caseloads.

Alarmed that the state was not taking action, journalists at The Charlotte Observer went to work. They researched the circumstances of nearly 100 children's deaths in that five-year period, interviewing families, social workers and state officials.

The Observer's five-part investigative series, "Children Who Didn't Have To Die," pieced together a detailed picture of a system that was clearly failing its mission to protect children.

As a result of The Observer's efforts, North Carolina budgeted funds that will allow for more social workers, smaller caseloads, better computers and broader access to criminal records. And journalists at The Observer showed once again what an important role Knight Ridder newspapers play in the communities they serve.

Che Charlotte Observer

CHILDREN
WHO DIDN'T HAVE TO BRIEF IN THE BRIEF

>KNIGHTRIDDER> INFORMATION FOR LIFE

The Philiadelphia Inquirer
Detroit Free Press
The Miami Herald
San Jose Mercury News
Nuevo Mundo, Viet Mercury
The Kansas City Star
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Diario La Estrella (Dallas/Ft. Worth)
The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer
St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press
Contra Costa Times

Philadelphia Daily News
Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal
The (Columbia, S.C.) State
Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader
The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle
el Nuevo Herald (Miami)
The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph
Belleville (ill.) News-Democrat
Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat
The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) Sun New
The (Biloxi, Miss.) Sun Herald

Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer
Duluth (Minn.) News Tribune
The (Fort Wayne, Ind.) News-Sentine!
(Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) Times Leader
Bradenton (Fla.) Herald
The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune
The Monterey County (Calif.) Herald
Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
State College, Pa.) Centre Daily Times
Aberdeen (S.D.) American News
The Olathe (Kan.) News

We're local, coast to coast, in newspapers and on the Real Cities Network, www.realcities.com.



